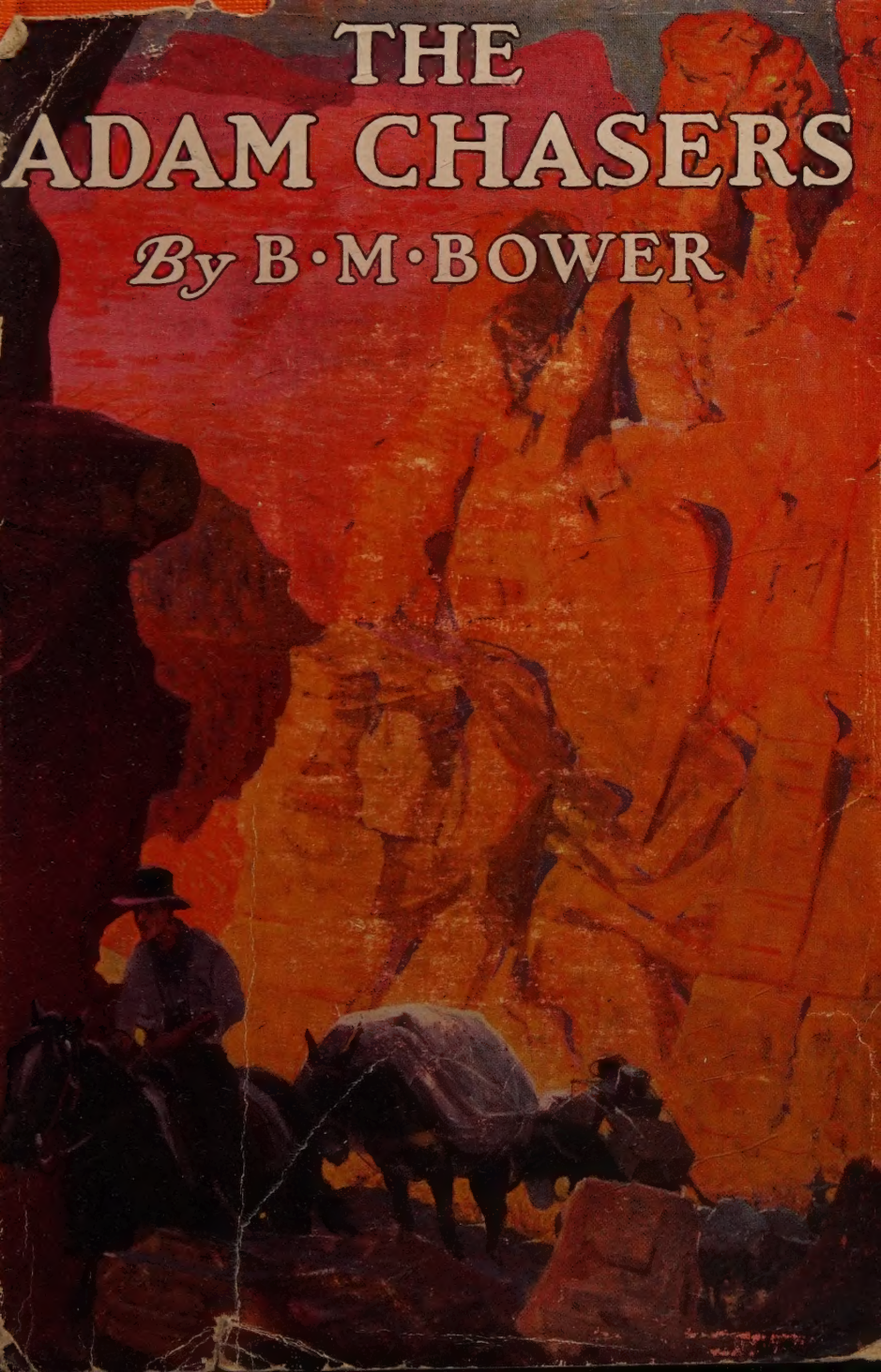
THE ADAM CHASERS

By B·M·BOWER



WHITE WOLVES

By

B. M. BOWER

To Lawrie Brunelle, an artist seeking beauty among the Western mountains and on the ranges, the crude raillery of the Meadowlark cowboys is a constant irritation. He finally leaves the ranch in disgust when his symbolic painting of white wolves with human faces driving away cattle is taken by the "boys" as an insult to those whose faces have been used as models.

By chance he is able to buy a practically inaccessible island in the Missouri River, with the nucleus of a herd of cattle, and settle down contentedly to raise stock and paint and dream. Unfortunately the island appeals also as a refuge to Kid Kern, wanted by the sheriff, and he brings complications in which the appearance of the lonely figure of a girl playing the harmonica on a rocky hillside figures.

"'White Wolves' is a western story with novelty and abundant action, and it has the touches of humor on which the reader can always count in a Bower yarn." — *The Boston Herald.*

"It is a brisk and snappy yarn. When it gets into its full stride, it rushes along rapidly with a great variety of incident — dramatic, startling, breath-taking, romantic, humorous, with a graphically pictured background of mountains, plain, ranch and frontier town." — *The New York Times.*

"Action is never lacking in B. M. Bower's stories, nor a wholesome philosophy, nor clean romance. And never were these characteristics more engagingly combined than in this stirring tale whose setting is the grassy Meadowlark Basin through which twists the shining Missouri." — *The Boston Transcript.*

THE ADAM CHASERS

By B. M. Bower

Good Indian
Lonesome Land
The Ranch at the Wolverine
The Flying U's Last Stand
The Heritage of the Sioux
Starr, of the Desert
Cabin Fever
Skyrider
Rim o' the World
The Quirt
Cow-Country
Casey Ryan
The Trail of the White Mule
The Voice at Johnnywater
The Parowan Bonanza
The Eagle's Wing
The Bellehelen Mine
Desert Brew
Meadowlark Basin
Black Thunder
Van Patten
White Wolves
The Adam Chasers

THE ADAM CHASERS

BY

B. M. BOWER

BOSTON

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THE ADAM CHASERS

CHAPTER ONE

A SAGE-BRUSH SAMARITAN

HALFWAY up a long canyon that cut a six-mile gash through rugged mountains thinly pock-marked with prospect holes, the radiator cap of Lewis Abington's car blew off with a pop like amateur home brew. For a matter of a minute or more that particular brand of automobile developed a lively hot-water geyser. Followed a brief period of steaming, and after that it stalled definitely, set square in the trail which ran through deep, sandy gravel and glacial rubble; a hot car and a sulky looking one — if you know what I mean.

The driver harried the starter with vicious jabs of his heel, then crawled reluctantly out into the blistering wind which seemed to be driving down the sunlight with needle points of heat that stung and smarted the skin where it struck. The canteens were buried deep under rolled camp paraphernalia, a circumstance which gave occasion for a few minutes of profane monologue. Curiously, the driver's vituperation was directed neither at the car nor the wind nor the heat, but at an absent individual whom he called Shorty, and another named Pete.

Considerable luggage was shifted before the canteens were finally excavated from the floor of the tonneau; both canteens, because the first one was so completely empty that it made no sound when Abington impatiently shook it. He was standing beside the car, mechanically sloshing a pint or so of water in the second grimy, flat-bottomed canteen, when a dust-covered roadster came coasting down the four per cent. grade of the canyon half a mile or so away. The driver glanced at the approaching car, set the canteen in the sand and helped himself to a cigarette from a silver-trimmed, leather case. He was leaning against the rear fender in the narrow bit of shade when the roadster came down upon him, slowed with a squealing of dry brakes and stopped perforce. In the rocks and deep sand that bordered the road a caterpillar truck could scarely have driven around the stalled car.

"In trouble?" A perspiring, tanned face leaned out, squinting ahead into the sun through desert-wrinkled eyelids.

"None whatever," the first driver calmly replied, smiling to make the words cheerful. "I'm waiting here for the car to cool off a bit. I hope you're not in a hurry?"

The driver of the roadster slanted a quick glance at his companion, slumped sidewise in the seat with his hat pulled low over his eyes.

"Kinda. Got plenty of water?" This in a hope-

ful tone, which his next sentence explained. "I'm kinda short, myself, but I'll hit Mina before long, so I ain't worrying. How much you going to need? Half a canteen do you any good?"

The stalled driver walked forward with a loose, negligent stride which nevertheless covered the ground with amazing ease. From under straight black brows his eyes looked forth with the same apparent negligence though they saw a great deal with a flicking glance or two.

"It might take me back to where I can fill my canteens, brother. I don't suppose there's a quart of water in the radiator, and everything's empty. My fault. I discharged a couple of men I had with me, and I should have been on my guard against some such trick as this. As it was, I failed to stand over them while they unloaded their plunder from the car. At any rate, here I am for the present."

"Tough luck. I'll let you have what water I've got, but it ain't much. She kept heating on me, climbing the summit. How far you going?"

"Back to Mina. I want to find those two fellows I let off there." The questing black eyes rested on the roadster's other occupant, shifted to the driver's hard yet not unkindly face, and he waved the cigarette significantly.

"Better give this fellow a drink, before I empty the canteen." He nodded toward the slack figure. "And

if you'll pardon the suggestion, Sheriff, I'd turn him loose for a bit. Pretty rough riding, even when you've got all your hands and feet to hang on by."

The other gave a short, apologetic laugh.

"Say, this feller's plumb mean, is why I got him shackled that way. Car broke down, the other side of Tonopah, and I'm taking him through alone. He's a slippery cuss. Had us chasin' him off and on for two years. I can't take any chances."

"You're not." If the tone was ironic the eyes were friendly enough. "But the man looks sick. A drink of water and a smoke won't make him any more dangerous, I imagine."

"Yeah, I know he acts sick, and he looks sick. But it might be a stall, at that." The officer turned and eyed his prisoner doubtfully. "I don't want to be hard on anybody — and I don't want to be bashed over the bean and throwed out on the desert to die, neither! She's a lonely road — I'll tell anybody."

For all that, he got out, unlocked the tool box on the running board, took out a smaller box of screws, bolts, nuts and cotter pins, fumbled within it with thumb and finger and finally produced a small, flat key.

"Never pays to be in a hurry to git a pair of handcuffs open," he muttered to Abington. "This way's safe as I can make it. He's a bad *hombre*."

Abington nodded understandingly and stood back while the deputy sheriff walked around the car and

freed his passenger from the handcuffs which were fastened behind his back. For an appreciable space the fellow dropped indifferently where he was, not even taking the trouble to rub his chafed wrists, though they must have pained him considerably, swollen and discolored as they were with the snug steel bands and the awkward position forced upon him.

"Have a drink of water," Abington suggested, not too kindly. More as if he were speaking to a man who was free to go where he pleased.

The fellow looked up at him, nodded and lifted a hand shaking from cramp. Abington unscrewed the cap and steadied the canteen to the man's mouth. He drank thirstily, pushed the canteen away with the back of his hand, lifted his hat and drew a palm across his flushed forehead where the veins stood out like heavy cords drawn just under the skin.

"Thanks." He gave Abington another glance, a gleam in his eyes as of throttled speech.

"Have a smoke. Here, keep the case while we're getting the car started." Abington glanced at the officer. "You've no objection, I suppose?"

"Hell, no! What do you take me for? Just because I use some precautions against being brained while I'm busy driving, don't mean I'm hard boiled." He sent a measuring glance toward either side of the straight-walled canyon. Within half a mile there was no cover for a man, and the cliffs rose sheer. "You

can get out if you want to, Bill," he said to the prisoner. "Guess you won't go far with them leg irons."

"Thanks." The prisoner's voice was perfunctory, and he seemed in no great hurry to avail himself of the privilege. While the others walked to the stalled car — the deputy watching over his shoulder — the prisoner sat where he was, smoking a cigarette from Abington's leather-and-silver case.

The stalled car refused to start. That mechanical condition which is called freezing held the cylinders locked fast until such time as the expansion subsided, and in the fierce heat of that canyon the motor failed to cool quickly. Abington suggested coasting backward to the first place where a turnout had been provided.

"There's a turnout back here a couple of hundred yards or such a matter. If you can give me a push over this little hump, I think the car will roll down the road easily enough," he explained. "I'll have to keep it in the road, Sheriff, or I could manage alone."

The deputy rather liked being called sheriff, and he was anxious to reach Carson City that evening with his prisoner. Until Abington's car moved out of the way, he himself was stalled, since he could not move forward more than the hundred feet which separated the two cars. There was no other road down that canyon.

"If Bill Jonathan wasn't feeling so tough, I'd take off the hobbles and make him get out and help," he

grumbled, looking back at the roadster. "But I guess he's sick, all right. He ain't left the car yet. Well, you get in and hold 'er in the ruts, mister ——"

"My name is Abington. I'm an archæologist ——"

"That right? My name's Park. I'm sure glad to meet you, Doctor Abington. Heard a lot about you and them petrified animals and things you've been digging up. Got the brake off? All right ——"

But the best he could do, just at first, was to rock the car a few inches each way. Between shoves, he looked over his shoulder. The prisoner apparently preferred the shade of the car to the heat of the sun, and Park soon ceased to worry about him. Midway between Tonopah and Mina is a poor spot to choose for a walk-away, even if the man were free to walk, he reflected. However desperate he might be, Bill Jonathan was no fool. He knew well enough that Park would shoot at the first hint of trouble. The deputy grunted and turned his attention to the work at hand.

Abington got out and helped claw the hot, loose sand away from behind the rear wheels, got in again and steered while Park braced himself and heaved against the front fender. The car moved backward nearly a foot, and the two grinned triumphantly at each other.

"Next time — I'll get her — Doctor Abington!" The deputy puffed, glancing over his shoulder as he mopped trickles of sweat from face and neck. A thin

wreath of cigarette smoke waved out from the prisoner's side of the roadster, and Park grinned at Abington behind the wheel.

"Hope you're well fixed for cigarettes," he chuckled good-humoredly. "Bill's trying to smoke enough to last till he gets outa the pen, looks like."

"He's welcome," Abington returned, a smile hidden under his pointed black beard. "I've plenty more."

"Just as you say. All right, let's give her another shove. Gosh, it's hot!"

Grunting and straining, he moved the car three feet backward to where a nest of small stones halted it again. Encouraged by the slight progress, the two knelt again behind the rear wheels and began to paw a clear path in the gravel. The "hump", one of those small ridges which characterize desert roads, would be passed within the next six feet.

At the precise moment when Park was kneeling with his back half turned from his own car, the starter whirred with an instant roar of the motor just under a full feed of gas. The roadster shot backward up the trail, guided evidently by guess and a helpful divinity, since Bill Jonathan's head never once appeared outside the car to watch the trail behind him as a driver usually does. Park jumped up, pulled his old-fashioned, range-model Colt and fired six shots in rapid succession, evidently realizing that he must get them all in before the car was out of range. With the sixth shot

the glass was seen to fly from a headlight, then the hammer clicked futilely against an empty shell.

Park swore as he started running up the trail after the car, the driver's head now plainly in sight as he leaned out and watched the road. A good fifteen miles an hour he was making in reverse; and unless a car came down the canyon and stopped him as Park had been halted, for the simple reason that he could not turn out, Bill Jonathan seemed in a fair way of making his escape.

"The damn' fool — he can't get far with them leg irons on," Park grunted, coming to a stop where the roadster had stood. "That's what I get for being so damn' soft-hearted! I *told* you he was a bad *hombre*, Doctor Abington!"

CHAPTER TWO

THE MESSAGE IN GLYPHS

ABINGTON walked forward a few steps, then stooped and picked up his cigarette case from the hot sand of the trail.

"Spencer founded his whole philosophy on the premise that there is a soul of goodness even in things evil," he observed, with the little, hidden smile tucked into the corners of his black-bearded lips. "Your man has made off with your car, but he very thoughtfully returned my cigarette case — not altogether empty, either. Not knowing I have a full carton in the car, he has left us a cigarette apiece; which proves the soul of goodness within the evil. Will you have a smoke, Sheriff?"

"Might as well, I guess," Park grumbled, his eyes on the departing car. "This is a hell of a note! Doctor Abington, what we've got to do is make it in to Mina and get word out to the different towns before Bill can make Tonopah or Goldfield. Thunder! Who'd ever think he'd try to pull off a stunt like that? I was going to take the irons off his legs, but I kinda had a hunch not to. Never dreamed he'd pull out with the car while his legs was shackled; did you?"

"I'm afraid my mind was quite taken up with my own problem," Abington confessed in a slightly apologetic tone. "I'm not accustomed to chasing live men, you know. It's the dead ones I'm interested in, and the longer they've been dead the better. Nevertheless, Sheriff, I realize your predicament. If there's a long-distance telephone in Mina you can intercept the fellow at Tonopah, I should think." He was thoughtfully turning the cigarette case over in his fingers as if his habit was to admire its glossy brown leather and the silver filagree. Now he slipped it into his pocket and turned to retrace his steps.

"I suppose we ought to get the old boat headed down the trail, Sheriff. Your prisoner went off with your canteen, you know, so we'll have to pet my motor along as best we can. But she'll roll down the canyon in neutral, and then we'll drive it as far as we can — which may not be far. At the turnout, down the road here, I'll get the car headed in the other direction, and it wouldn't surprise me if we beat your man in, after all. Will he have gas enough to take him to Tonopah?"

"Lord, yes! I filled the tank plumb full, and it's one of them old thirty-gallon tanks. But somebody'll maybe run across him trying to fill the radiator or something, and see the leg irons and take him in. Tires ain't none too good — maybe he'll have tire trouble. I sure hope so," he added earnestly.

Abington, leaning to push at the side of the car while he kept one hand on the steering wheel, did not answer. Park added his weight at the front fender, straining until his gloomy countenance went purple. The car rolled over the hump, and Abington hopped nimbly to the running board, watched his chance and straddled in behind the wheel.

Some time was lost in negotiating the turn, and after that, coasting down the canyon road with a dead engine cooled the cylinders considerably. By skilful management, Abington was able to start the motor and use what power was needed to drive the car up over certain small knolls near the foot of the canyon. At the edge of the long valley a hill gave them momentum sufficient to carry them well down toward a white, leprous expanse called Soda Lake, with a tiny settlement a few miles beyond. Here in the chuck holes of the soda-encrusted lake bed, the car refused to go any farther without power, and power in that grilling heat required a full radiator.

Even so, the two made fair time walking, and at the settlement Abington was able to hire a man to haul water out to the car. Also, Park was successful in getting wires through to the sheriff's office at Tonopah and also at Goldfield, the only points he believed Bill Jonathan would attempt to reach.

"If you like, Sheriff, we can follow up your man at once," Abington suggested, when Park came out of

the telegraph office, looking relieved. "I'm willing to postpone the pleasure of chastising Shorty and Pete, and drive you straight through to Tonopah. Water is the only thing I needed for the trip, and the man is waiting out here with a full supply, ready to drive us back to my car. At the most we will be only three hours behind the fugitive, and as you say, he can't do much with leg irons on. He'll need to have a remarkable run of luck if he reaches there ahead of us. For instance, your motor had been heating, and you had only half a canteen of water. As I remember the road, there's a long, hard climb for several miles beyond that canyon. He'll be compelled to fill up with water at that spring just over the summit; one stop, at least, where he will have enough awkward walking to hold him there twice as long as a man with his legs free. So——"

"Say, Doctor Abington, you sure can figure things out!" Park grinned while he bit the end off a forlorn-looking cigar he had just bought at the little store. "You ought to be a detective."

"I am. I've been trying to detect the origin of the human race for years now," Abington grinned. "It's the same kind of figuring brought down to modern conditions. If you're ready, Sheriff, we'll get under way."

So back they went, roaring up the long, rough trail to the canyon and on to Tonopah. They did not meet

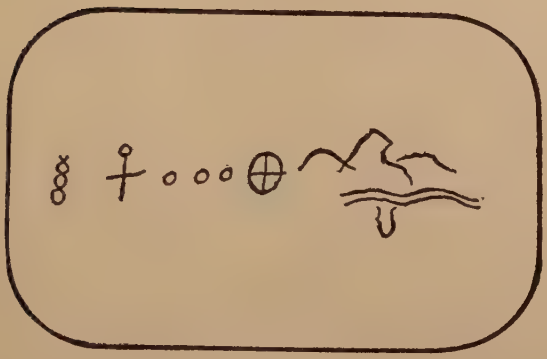
a soul on the way, nor did they overtake Bill Jonathan and the roadster. Neither did the deputy glimpse anywhere a sign of Bill's turning aside from the main highway, though his eyes watered from watching intently the trail.

Abington proved to be a scientifically reckless driver and a silent one withal. Within an incredibly short time he landed a grateful deputy at the sheriff's office in Tonopah, bade him an unperturbed adieu, drove his car into a garage and established himself comfortably in the best hotel the town afforded — all with the brisk, purposeful air of one who is clearing away small matters so that he may take up the business which really engrosses his mind.

In his room at the hotel John Abington dragged the most comfortable chair directly under the two-globe chandelier, lighted a cigarette from the pasteboard box which he took from his pocket, and pulled out the leather cigarette case as if this was what he had been all along preparing to do.

"Got a tack from the upholstery, no doubt, for a stylus," he mused. "Old car — binding probably loose on the door pocket — that's where it gives first. Hm-m —— That's what he waited for. Knew he meant to escape, of course — saw it in his eyes. Hm-m —— Let's see, now."

Abington blew a cloud of smoke and thoughtfully examined the case as he turned it over slowly in his



hand, just as he had done when he picked it up in the canyon road. As he studied it his lips moved in that silent, musing speech which was his habit — the black beard offering perfect concealment for his soundless whisperings.

"Hm-m — clever of him! — hieroglyphics adapted to code work. Let's see. The old Babylonian chain of evil — three links, meaning not so bad; following that, a man. Humph. That's Bill himself, no doubt. Next — hm-mm — that's Egyptian — the old Egyptian symbol denoting the number of days' journey, but with the Babylonian and Manchurian moon-month at the end. Probably meant a month's journey, and didn't know the sign for it. Bill, my lad, you show intelligence above the average layman, at least.

"Now, what's all this? Water sign, mountains, stopping place — Bill descended to picture writing there, I see! That's the mountain across from my camp where I took Bill in and fed him — gave him my best hiking boots too, by Jove! My camp by the river — Bill, you are ingenious!

"Without a doubt you wish me to understand that within a month you will be at my old camp by the river — counting on more food and more boots, perhaps! Hm-m — I don't just know about that. Don't see how you are going to make it. Handicap too heavy. Doubt whether I myself could overcome the obstacles — leg irons, officers on the watch, posses on

the trail, three hundred miles to go — Bill, old fellow, if you make it, you'll prove yourself a man worth helping! You won't get half the distance — but if you do, you may have my next-best boots and welcome!"

He turned the case over, held it closer to the light, frowned and gave a faint whistle at what he saw. He had supposed that the message had been repeated here as a precaution against his failing to notice the barely discernible markings in the leather. But as he peered sharply at the fine indentations his eyes brightened with interest. For although the river and the stopping-place symbols were repeated, and the string of tiny circles which signified the number of days' journeying, the plural sign was there just below it. At the end of the journey, mountains — but they were indicated by the conventional, premodified Manchurian symbol; and close by, the sign of a mummy.

"What the deuce!" breathed Abington, pulling black eyebrows together. "He's blundered there — maybe means he'll leave my camp only in custody — no, by Jove, that can't be it, either."

For a long time he sat motionless, except when he turned the cigarette case for a renewed scrutiny of the other side. The message that had seemed so simple presented an unexpected little twist of mystery. Bill Jonathan, pursued by the chain of evil, meant to journey for perhaps a month and arrive at John Ab-

ington's camp in the mountains that bordered the river. That much seemed fairly plain, and one would logically expect no further information at present.

But there was more to it, apparently. Bill had not sat in that roadster, idly scratching hieroglyphics on the cigarette case of an archæologist just to pass the time away. Meaning to escape in the car, uncertain too of the number of minutes at his disposal, he must have grudged every second of delay while he worked out his message.

Abington permitted his cigarette to go out while he brooded over those crude lines. His thoughts harked back to the time, four months ago, when Bill Jonathan had come limping into camp, crippled with stone bruises from traveling the rough granite hills in thin-soled shoes worn to tattered leather. Hungry too, by the manner in which he wolfed his first meal, whenever he thought Abington was not looking his way.

He had not told his name, and Abington had taken the hint and asked no questions. Bill called himself a prospector; said he had an outfit back in the hills, and had come down to Abington's camp to see if he could rustle a pair of boots and a little tobacco. A likable fellow, Abington had found him; one of those rare individuals who can display an intelligent interest in the other fellow's subject.

Abington at that time had been searching out and recording with a camera all the ancient rock carvings

along the river, and while his feet were healing Bill had wanted to know all about the various symbols and their meaning. He had told Abington of two or three canyons where writings could be found, and he had discussed with Abington the possibility of finding petrified human remains ——

"By Jove!" Abington ejaculated, straightening suddenly in his chair. "I wonder if that is not what he means! That we'll both journey to a spot in the mountains where I can find my fossilized man!"

The idea once implanted in his mind, Abington could not seem to get rid of it. Without a doubt, that was the meaning Bill had meant to convey; that he had found the fossil man which would mean more to Abington than a gold mine — for such is the peculiar point of view held by scientists of a certain school: that specimens may frequently be more precious than gold.

"Told him that mummy symbol indicated a burial — remember we discussed it. He recognized the sign from having seen one on a rock. I told him it undoubtedly meant that some one had been buried there. Hm-m — nothing else he *could* mean. Wasn't sitting in that car drawing marks for fun. Couldn't write a message; afraid Park might pick up the case, no doubt. Too bad — handicapped too heavily. Never will make it."

Nevertheless Abington loitered for four days in

Tonopah, though he had no business to hold him there; heard nothing of an escaped convict being captured in that part of the country, and finally went his way.

He had meant to hire more men and carry his explorations over into Utah, but the sporting instinct for once prevailed over scientific zeal. He still believed that Bill would never make it — that the "chain of evil" was too strong. But being an archæologist, he had learned the sublime lesson of a patient, plodding persistence that simply ignores failure. He returned alone to a field already pretty thoroughly covered, and reëstablished his old camp by the river. There he sat himself down to wait, with a brooding patience not unlike the eternal hills that hemmed him in.

CHAPTER THREE

BILL EXPLAINS THE MUMMY SIGN

BILL JONATHAN came walking into the firelight one evening, barely within the month he had given himself in the symbolic message. Face drawn and sallow, eyes staring out from under his hat brim with a glassy dullness born of hunger-fever and fatigue mingled, perhaps, with that never-sleeping fear which dogs the soul of the hunted. But none of this showed in his manner, or in his greeting which gave the arrival a casual note.

"Hello, Professor. Got my message, I see. Well, I had one merry heck of a trip, but here I am." He dropped down where he could lean against Abington's favorite camp boulder — lean there at ease or crawl swiftly out of sight behind the broken ledge, Abington observed with that negligent, flicking glance of his. Another glance dropped briefly to Bill's ankles, and Bill laughed wryly.

"Didn't think I meant to wear them things permanent, did you, Professor? Hell, I ain't no Aztec princess, going around with anklets on that 'd sink a whale. No, I was up at the old Honey Boy mine, in the blacksmith shop, setting on a bench with one foot

in a vise, filing faster than a buzz saw when I heard you folks go past, down in the gulch. At least, I s'pose it was you folks, because it was a cinch nobody would pass you in the canyon, and I had it doped out you'd roll down to where you could get water, and come chasing me up. Hauled my nursemaid on into Tonopah, I'll bet!"

"I did that," smiled Abington, tossing Bill his cigarette case before opening a can of baked beans while the coffee heated. "I really didn't think you'd make it, though. Handicap too heavy."

Bill accepted the cigarette case, pausing to eye with prideful interest the markings. He lighted a cigarette and relishfully inhaled three mouthfuls before he spoke.

"If you mean them irons, I didn't wear 'em long. Just till I could get the bus up to the old Honey Boy. Wonder you didn't spot the place where I turned off — maybe you did. It was on your side the road." He saw Abington nod, and grinned appreciatively. "Well, it rained some that night, and that helped dim the tracks. Nobody came near the mine; not while I was there, anyhow.

"Friend Park had a fair lot of grub in the back of the car, and I rustled a little more at the mine. Waited till dark and beat it back down the canyon and over to Bishop. Made Randsburg, drove the car over a cliff into a brushy canyon just before I got

there, walked in with an old bed roll I'd fixed up at the Honey Boy, as good a blanket-stiff as the next one! Worked there a week and blew out again, first pay day — hit it just right, as it happened.

"Hoboed to San Berdoo, doubled back to Needles — hanging tight to my blanket roll and my time check to show I'd worked not so long ago. And I've been hoofing it up the river since then."

Abington nodded again and pulled the coffeepot off the coals, using a crooked stick for the purpose. It suddenly occurred to him that crooked sticks are sometimes more useful than straight ones, and he gave Bill Jonathan an unhurried, measuring look as he extended a cup of black coffee.

"That mummy sign, Bill. Did you mean by that you had discovered more ancient writings? Or did you by any chance refer to skeletal remains?"

Bill took a great swallow of coffee and set down the cup. His tired eyes brightened in the fireglow.

"Maybe you'd call 'em skeletons, Professor — I'd say they're rock. All you want. Thought you'd like to take a look at 'em. So when we met up with you on the way to Carson I made up my mind I wouldn't wait till I was turned loose. You might be to hellan'gone by that time, or some nosey Adam chaser might run acrost 'em. I seen last spring how you've got your heart set on finding the granddaddy of all men, or some such thing, and I'd kinda hate to see

anybody beat you to it. So I made my git-away in order to show you where they're at."

Having thus explained the matter to his own satisfaction, Bill forthwith began to empty the can of beans in a manner best pleasing to himself.

John Abington poked absently at the fire, gently rapping upon a burning juniper branch until it broke under the blows, spurting sparks as it fell into the coals.

"Adam chasers, as you call it, are not so numerous in this country," he said softly. "Not nearly so numerous as — er — deputy sheriffs."

Bill Jonathan leaned sidewise, reached the coffeepot and refilled his cup.

"Yeah, I get you," he said finally. "But this is wild country we're going into. I ain't taking such an awful chance, now I got this far. I was duckin' sheriffs when I found these stone men. I've got to go on duckin' sheriffs, anyway — that, or else let 'em ketch me and put me in for five or ten years. It's six one way and a half-dozen the other.

"This is how I've got it doped out, Professor. You and me throw in together. I'll show you Adam — or his wife's folks, anyway — and you furnish me with grub and tobacco so I don't have to show up where I can be nabbed. I'll draw on you for supplies, and keep along close without trailing right with you. So you won't get in bad if it's found out I'm in

the hills." He looked across the fire at Abington. "How's it strike you, Professor?"

Over and over Abington had considered this very point during his month of waiting. It all depended on Bill himself, he had decided. Some men are so constituted that preying upon society is second nature to them. Others fall afoul of the law through no real criminal intent. There is a vast difference between the two types, Abington knew. It all depended on Bill.

"I never did function as guardian angel to escaped convicts," he said with brutal directness. "Laws are better kept than broken, as you will probably agree, and it ill becomes a loyal citizen to help any man dodge the penalty for his misdeeds. On the other hand, even lawbreakers may contribute something to the general welfare of the world. Discovering the skeletal relics of a man of the Cretaceous period may not materially help to liquidate the national debt, but it would be a priceless contribution to the scientific knowledge of the human race."

"Yeah, and I can go on and finish that argument, myself. I can't do no more damage to society while I'm herdin' with the coyotes, and if I can help you find what you're lookin' for, that's better than loafin' around doing time in Carson. So you won't be doing nothing worse than taking a boarder off the hands of the State. That's about the way you doped it out, ain't it, Professor?"

"Essentially the same, yes," Abington admitted. "I'm glad you have so thorough an understanding of the matter. I think if your offence was not too great I could perhaps get you paroled and placed in my charge, but that would take time and —— They've just discovered the skull of an ape-man in Rhodesia, Bill! I'd give a good deal to be able to show them a Cretaceous man taken from the neighborhood of the Colorado River."

Bill leaned back with a sigh of repletion and lighted his second cigarette.

"Well, I dunno how Cretaceous they are, Professor, but they're fossils, all right enough. Stone, anyway. 'Way back in a cave — you have to crawl on your belly quite a ways, where I went in. I guess maybe there's another opening somewhere. I didn't look for it. I had piñon knots for torches, and I lit a fresh one soon as I come into this chamber — or cave. And when the blaze showed them stone skeletons — say, Professor, I backed right out the same way I'd went in!"

"How do you know they were fossilized? They may have been modern — no more than a hundred years old! They may even have been frontiersmen trapped in there while trying to escape from hostile Indians." Abington's tone was crisp.

"I went back," Bill declared calmly. "Got over my scare and wanted to see for sure whether them

skeletons was twelve feet high like they looked to be, or just plain man-size. So I looked good, next time in. There was four, and the biggest wasn't over eight feet. And they was solid stone, far as I could tell."

"I don't suppose you could describe the geologic conditions appertaining to the remains. I shall have to determine that, of course, when I arrive at the spot."

During a silent five minutes Bill smoked and eyed the archæologist where he sat meditatively tapping another burned stick into coals.

"One thing I better tell you, Professor," he ventured at last, vaguely stirred by the rapt look in Abington's dark eyes. "There's a lot more to it than just 'arriving at the spot', as you say. When I first went into that cave I was *scared* in. There's something up in there that got my goat. Finally I beat it outa there — that's how I got nabbed by the law.

"I can't tell yuh what it is, Professor. Some kinda animal. Makes tracks like a mountain sheep — but it ain't a sheep; or if it is —— All I can say is that us Adam chasers will have to keep our eyes peeled."

CHAPTER FOUR

A MYSTERIOUS MARAUDER

ABINGTON stood absolutely motionless with his head drooped forward, his narrowed eyes surveying with brief, darting glances his devastated camp. The small brown tent, lying in a tattered heap with slits criss-crossing one another in the balloon silk which was so light to carry — and so costly — received a second scrutiny. The camp supplies, that had been neatly piled just where he had unloaded them from the two burros, were strewn about in indescribable disorder, as if a drove of hogs had held carnival there for an hour or so.

Because of the view it gave of the fantastic, red sandstone crags across the valley, he had pitched his camp on a smooth, hard ledge a few feet above the level with a cliff at his back and a spring of good water hidden away in a tiny cleft in the canyon at his right. A cool, sightly spot, free from bothersome ant hills or weedy growth that might harbor rattlesnakes or other venomous creatures.

True to his word, Bill Jonathan camped apart from Abington. In this particular location he had chosen a cave half a mile up the canyon — and he had imme-

diately set about walling up the entrance so that he must squeeze in between two rocks which he could move across the aperture at night.

"Getting close to the range of that gosh-awful thing, Professor," he had explained. "Better hunt a hole yourself and crawl into it — 'specially at night. And you want to keep your eyes peeled, and don't go prowlin' around without your gun, or a knife, or something."

Abington liked his little brown silk tent, however, and he was not particularly impressed by the gosh-awfulness of the thing which Bill Jonathan could not even describe — he having failed to catch so much as a glimpse of it, as he had been forced to admit under Abington's questioning.

But here was the ruin left by some animal, and Abington found himself completely at a loss as he circled the camp, going slowly and studying the wreckage foot by foot. On the ledge itself he did not expect to see any tracks. He walked therefore to the edge of the hardpan and examined the softer gravel at the foot of the two-foot slope.

There, clearly outlined in a finer streak of red, gravelly sand, he discovered the imprint of a cloven foot; a gigantic sheep, by the track, or possibly an elk, though elk were not known in that country.

For some minutes he stood there looking for other tracks. When he found one he whistled under

his breath. From the length of the stride indicated by that second hoofprint he judged that this particular animal must be considerably larger than a caribou. "Gosh-awful" it certainly must be!

Abington stared down the wash, for a moment tempted to follow the tracks. But with night coming on and an empty stomach clamoring to be filled, he hesitated. There was the wrecked camp to set to rights, and such supplies as had not been destroyed must be gathered together and placed where this malicious-minded animal could not reach them again. Moreover, the tracks might not be fresh, for the damage could have been done at any time during the afternoon while he and Bill were exploring a complex assortment of crooked ravines tangled at the head of the larger one where Bill had prepared to hole up in gloomy security.

He was thoughtfully regarding a sack of flour that had been slashed lengthwise and dragged in wanton destructiveness half across the ledge, when Bill Jonathan's voice sounded behind him, swearing a dismayed oath.

"Looks like it's been here a'ready!" Bill gasped when Abington turned and glanced at him.

"Looks as though something has been here," Abington agreed. "Very unusual incident, in some of the details. Certain incongruities can scarcely be accounted for until I have further investigated the

matter. I have had a herd of wild elephants stampede through camp, and I know the work of every marauding animal from the jungle tigers to the wolverines of Canada. But I have never seen anything quite like this.

"For instance, the slits in that tent plainly started from the peak and extended downward with an upward thrust near the bottom that left a triangular rent. Any horned animal that could rip a tent like that invariably lowers the head and gores with an upward toss. So does a hog. Certain indications would seem to point to a wild hog — or a drove of them! — but I believe the longest slits in the tent were accomplished while it was still standing. You will observe that the rents are spaced with a regularity impossible to attain while the material lay bundled in a heap on the ground. The cloth has not been chewed, therefore it could not be the work of wild cattle. Moreover, that sack of salt was not touched. Wouldn't you suppose, Bill, that any herbivorous animal would smell the salt and go after it first?"

"Yeah, but this creature don't ever touch salt, Professor. Not as far as I know. Did it leave any tracks?"

"Down here in the sand are some enormous hoofprints resembling sheep or elk tracks, Bill. From its stride, the beast must be as large as a camel."

"Yeah, and I've known it to leave mule tracks be-

hind it!" Bill declared glumly. "Now, maybe you'll want to crawl into my cave, Professor!"

"I may decide to let you store what supplies are left, but I myself don't fancy caves except for research work. By the way, did you notice any eoliths in that cave of yours, Bill?"

"I dunno. Killed a scorpion about four inches long with his tail curled up. You ain't afraid of bugs, are yuh, Professor?"

Abington gave him a sharp glance, but Bill was innocent and looked it.

"It doesn't matter now, since I shall probably spend a week or more exploring these ravines. There should be a good many artifacts left in the caves hereabouts. The carvings indicate that the ancient people lived here and I have an idea that their occupancy of this section of the country extended over a considerable period of time. This old Cretaceous sandstone gives every indication ——"

"Yeah, and it'll give 'em just the same to-morrow, don't you think, Professor? I'm going to take what's left of the flour and cache it away in my cave, and that can of coffee. Looks to me like the thing was scared off before it finished the job. All the times I've saw it get in its work before now, it sure was thorough! You must of scared it ——"

"In that case, I may be able to catch it."

Abington turned and strode again to where the

tracks lay printed deep in the packed sand. He stepped down off the ledge and followed the hoof-prints, scanning each one sharply as he came to it.

"Hey! You can't trail that thing, Professor!" Bill called anxiously. "I tried that — once when it was a sheep and another time when it was a burro. Tracks take to the hills and quit.

"Aw, gwan and find out for yourself, then!" he grumbled, when Abington merely flung up his hand to show that he heard, and continued along the wash. "Won't be satisfied to take my word — never see such a bull-headed cuss. But it won't be long, old boy, till you'll be tickled to death if you're able to dodge it!"

Dusk deepened. Bill hurriedly salvaged what supplies were not utterly destroyed, looking frequently over his shoulder when his work would not permit him to keep his back toward the cliff. It seemed a long while before Abington returned, and Bill's uneasiness reached the point where he threw back his head to send a loud halloo booming out into the darkness. But at the very moment Abington came stumbling up to the ledge, leaning heavily on a dead mescal stalk while one foot dragged. Bill leaped forward and pulled him up the slope.

"Rock rolled down the hill and started a slide," Abington explained, in a flat, tired voice. "Dodged most of the rubble, but one fragment struck against

my ankle. Temporarily paralyzed my foot. Be all right in a short time, Bill."

He sat down, breathing rather heavily, utterly exhausted from his climb.

"Who done it?" Bill knelt and tentatively felt the injured foot.

"No one, so far as I know. I am not sure, of course, but my impression is that the slide was purely accidental."

"See anything of your sheep?"

"Too dark to detect any signs after it took to the rocks. Heard something — up the hill. Couldn't exactly locate the sound. Any coffee, Bill?"

Bill had been itching to get back to his cave and make coffee there, but now he looked at Abington and hesitated. Neither Abington nor any other man could laugh at Bill and call him a coward. There had been a small pile of firewood — it was scattered around somewhere amongst the débris. The coffeepot, he knew, had been flattened as if an elephant had stepped on it; but he could find a can that would serve, he supposed.

He groped for the wood, found it and got a fire started. A cheerful zone of light pushed back the shadows, making them eerier than when all was gloom. He set about supper of a sort — keeping his back to the ledge with a persistence that might have amused Abington if he had not been wholly occupied

with the mystery that had impinged upon an otherwise uneventful trip.

"I can't fathom it," he said at last, speaking half to himself. "It is not a mountain sheep, I'm certain of that. Those slits in the tent, and the salt sack ignored — those two details alone place the depredations apart from the work of any such animal."

"Yeah, there *ain't* no such animal!" Bill looked up to remark. "Now you know why I wanted a gun, Professor. You thought it was for killing sheriffs, maybe, but you was wrong there. I told you there was something up here we'd have to look out for. I asked you to get me a gun, because I ain't got much hopes of killin' this thing by throwin' rocks at it. That's why."

"I'm sorry, Bill, but I really couldn't buy you a gun," Abington told him gravely. "And I don't think you will need one. The beast keeps himself out of sight, it seems. It isn't likely to attack either of us."

"Well, I'd about as soon be attacked as scared to death," Bill demurred. "That's just it, Professor. I wouldn't give a cuss if I could look the thing over once. What I hate is coming in and finding camp demolished and the grub all throwed out, and nothing you can fight back at. Well, here's your coffee. It's about all I could find to cook, in the dark."

They drank the coffee in silence, even the self-contained Abington pausing every minute or so to stare

into the darkness, listening. A nerve-trying pastime which netted them nothing in the way of enlightenment.

What it cost Bill to shoulder a load of more-or-less damaged supplies and go off alone up the canyon, his way lighted only by the stars, Abington could only guess. In justice to the peace officers of the county he could not give the man a gun, and he sensed that Bill was really afraid of the unknown marauder; with good reason, Abington was forced to admit. Bill had been hunted from camp to camp by something which he had never seen. He had been robbed and his food supplies destroyed until at last he had fled the place only to fall into the hands of the watchful sheriff. Abington couldn't blame Bill for his fears. All the same, he did not want to place a gun in the hands of an escaped prisoner. That, it seemed to him, would be going rather strong, even in the interests of science.

He was sitting with his back against the cliff with the dying fire before him, rubbing his numbed ankle to which sensation was returning with sharp stabs of pain, when Bill came up out of the canyon mouth with his bundle still on his shoulders and his eyes staring.

"It's been to the cave," he announced in a suppressed tone. "Clawed out the rocks I walled the opening up with, and raised hell with my stuff. Professor, how bad do yuh want them stone Adamses?"

CHAPTER FIVE

THREE DEAD BURROS

Across the valley the moon peered over a jagged pinnacle, looking as if broken teeth had bitten deep into its lower rim. But that effect was soon brushed away as the pale disk swung higher, and the blood-red sandstone peaks stood fantastically revealed in the swimming radiance. The narrow valley straightway became enchanted ground wherein fairy folk might dance on the smooth sand strips or play laughing games of hide-and-seek among the strange pillars and jutting crags.

Beside the dying fire Bill Jonathan dozed, head bent, with now and then an involuntary drop forward, whereupon he would rouse and glance sharply to left and right — the habit of a man who knows himself hunted, a man whose safety lies in unsleeping vigilance.

"Lie down on the tent, Bill," Abington advised him after his third startled awakening. "Lie down and make yourself comfortable. To-morrow you can watch while I sleep."

"Aw, I can keep awake, Professor. All that climbing around to-day made me kinda tired, is all. If I

know you're asleep, I'll keep my eyes open wide enough."

"But I don't want to sleep, Bill. This little mystery must be solved before we go any farther with our chief business. Couldn't sleep if I wanted to."

"You'll stay awake a darn long while, Professor, if you wait to put salt on the tail of the thing that haunts this valley," Bill opined.

Abington calmly knocked the dottle from his pipe and began to refill it, ready for another long, meditative smoke.

"For every problem in the universe there is a correct answer," he said quietly. "It is only our ignorance that makes mysteries of things simple enough in themselves. A peculiar arrangement of details has given this 'gosh-awful' animal of yours an air of mystery, but the explanation is simple enough, I'll guarantee."

"Yeah, but how are you going to find this explanation that you think is so darned simple?" Bill stifled a yawn.

"Just as I find the meaning of the hieroglyphics; by studying the symbols already familiar to me, and from them arriving at the natural relation of the unknown characters. This thing left tracks, and it managed to accomplish a certain amount of destruction in a given time. To-morrow morning I'll take a look at your

cave, and the answer to the puzzle will not be so hard to find as you imagine."

Bill mumbled a half-finished sentence and lay down on the torn tent, and presently the rhythmic sound of snoring hushed the strident chorus of stone crickets on the ledge.

Until the moon had swum its purple sea and reached shore on the western rim of the valley, Abington lounged beside the cliff, so quiet that any observer might have thought him asleep. For a time his pipe sent up a thin column of aromatic smoke, then went cold; and after that only the moonlight shining on his wide-open eyes betrayed the fact that Abington was very much awake.

An owl hooted monotonously in the canyon at his right, probably near the spring. A coyote yammered on the steep hillside across the canyon mouth, and a little later Abington heard the frightened, squealing cry of a rabbit caught unawares by that coyote or another.

On the cliff just over his head, shadowed now as the moon slipped behind the hill, the ancient people he was tracing had carved intricate tribal records enduring far beyond the last vague legend of those whose valor had thus been blazoned before their little world that had seemed so vast and imperishable, no doubt, to heroes and historians alike. It seemed to him that here was a land well fitted to hold the full story of

these forgotten lives, could he but find it, and read it aright. Might not his own name be blazoned one day before his own people, to be forgotten perchance in ages to come — as these were forgotten now?

The cave that held fast the bones of these ancient ones lay somewhere in the bewildering maze of canyons across the valley. Bill Jonathan would recognize the spot, he had declared, whenever Abington questioned him. A certain rock on the canyon's northern rim, shaped like the head of a huge rhinoceros with two tusks on his snout — Bill was positive he could not miss it once he got inside the canyon. The opening to the cave was directly under the first tusklike rock spire. A matter of ten miles perhaps, Bill had guessed, as he stood on the ledge and gazed across.

But here on this side were caves, and even with the hope of finding the fossil skeletons Bill had described, Abington had wanted to explore these before going on. He still wanted to do so, if he and Bill could manage to hunt down the unknown pillager of camps, or at least guard their supplies against further depredations. If the raid on Bill's cave had been as complete as on his own camp, he would be compelled to postpone all research work while he plodded with the burros to the nearest town for fresh supplies. Bill could not go, that was certain.

At daybreak he was planning drowsily to send Bill up the canyon after the burros, load on what was left

of the outfit and cross immediately to the other side of the valley, where they would endeavor to find the skeletons first of all and be sure of them before he went out for supplies. He would then be able to take out specimens to send on to his museum, thus saving a bothersome trip later on.

His hand reached out to shake Bill's leg and rouse him to the day's work, when a great clattering sounded in the canyon mouth near by. Bill needed no shaking to bring him to his feet. As the two automatically faced toward the noise, the three burros dashed in a panicky gallop out of the canyon and into the open.

In one great leap Bill left the ledge and ran yelling and flailing his arms to head them off before they stampeded down the valley. The lead burro, a staid, mouse-colored little beast, swerved from him, wheeled toward the opposite hills, stumbled and fell in a heap. The second kept straight on down the valley, the third burro at its heels. Bill let them go while he ran to the fallen leader.

Though it took but a minute to cover the short distance, the burro's eyes were already glazing when he arrived. As he stopped and bent over it, a shuddering convulsion seized its legs, and immediately it stiffened. A dead burro, carrion before the day was over.

Bill stood dumbfounded, eyeing it stupidly for a

moment before he turned to call Abington. But the shout died in his throat, for his glance had fallen upon a fresh disaster. The two other burros were down and kicking convulsively, just as the first had done. They were dead before he could reach them.

Abington was gone when Bill, walking heavily under the burden of this new tragedy, returned to the ledge; but presently he came limping out of the canyon and into camp.

"I thought I could discover what had stampeded the burros," he said, coming up with an indefinable air of surprise that Bill should be standing there passive with that blank look on his face. "Too late, again. If it was the 'gosh-awful' he'd disappeared before I could get up there. Did you head off the burros? I want to move camp this morning."

"Yeah — but you'll have to git along without 'em this morning. The damn' things is dead."

Abington looked at him, looked past him to where Bill pointed an unsteady finger. He got off the ledge and limped over to the nearest carcass, looked it over carefully, walked to the others and examined them, and returned thoughtfully to camp.

Bill had kindled a fire and was starting off to the spring with an empty bucket when Abington stopped him.

"Hey, come back here! Don't use any water from that spring."

"Yeah? Where will I use water from, then?"

"From a canteen, if there is any left. The burros were at the spring this morning and stampeded from there. I can't be certain yet, of course, but I think the water is poisoned."

Bill stared, his jaw sagging. Abington was looking out across the valley, his eyes narrowed and blacker than Bill had ever seen them.

"I may be wrong, Bill, but we can't afford to take a chance. One burro might suddenly pass out with heart failure, but when three of them turn up their toes in the same way and at the same moment, the coincidence will bear investigation, I think!"

"How could that sheep thing poison a spring?" Bill's tone implied violent incredulity.

"I don't know. I'm merely stating what appears to be a fact. Three burros drank at that spring, and afterward stampeded out of the canyon and dropped dead in the open. I'm assuming that the water in the spring, or at least in the little pool below it, was poisoned. They must have been scared away, else they would have died right there near the spring. Yes, I think it will bear investigation!"

"Yeah, but in the meantime we've got to have water," Bill said gloomily, shaking a canteen gently before he poured a little into his makeshift coffeepot. "I don't aim to stick around till my tongue swells up, doing fancy thinkin' about a poisoned spring. Suit

yourself, Professor, but I'm going to hunt water, soon as we go through the motions of eating."

"I suppose in time the spring itself will clear and run pure," Abington reassured him, with a twitching of his bearded lips. "If we were to stay here we could divert the trickle from the rocks, and soon have another pool. But we could never be sure that it was not poisoned again. No, Bill, we'll have to get our belongings together and move across the valley."

"A darn hard job," muttered Bill; "packing everything on our backs." And he added bodefully, "That sheep thing can travel too, don't overlook that fact, Professor."

CHAPTER SIX

A WATCHER ON THE RIDGE

THE eastern rim of the valley stood blood-red where the westering sun struck it full, bringing into bold relief each canyon and crag, the smallest fold and the smoothest boulder; as if a contour map had been painstakingly modeled on a gigantic scale in red sealing wax, or as if a world aflame had been paralyzed into utter silence.

Toward that garish pile of shattered hills, Abington and Bill Jonathan plodded with the low sun at their backs, which were burdened heavily with as much of their camp supplies as they had been able to retrieve and could carry.

The start that morning had been delayed until nearly noon while they searched vainly for some clue to the mystery that had in a few hours held an orgy of wanton destructiveness in two camps and had poisoned their water supply and killed three burros. Human malevolence had been displayed in that last attack, Abington was convinced.

Yet in spite of all his skill, all the careful attention to details which his scientific training had made second nature, he had failed to discover the slightest evidence

of a human agency at work against them. Not a sign, not a track save those enormous sheep tracks leaving the vicinity of the spring and going off up a narrow ravine in great strides which made it hopeless to think of overtaking it; for without water he did not dare attempt any prolonged search. Now, with a half mile of red sand to plow through before they reached the first bold hillside, their eyes clung perforce to the seamed, broken rampart they were nearing.

A dazzling light that flashed and was gone, then came again and stood motionless for a space while one might count fifteen, showed high up on a ridge as evenly serrated as a rooster's comb — and quite as red. Abington came to a full stop which he made a rest period by slipping the heavy pack from his shoulders. Nothing loath, Bill did likewise. The two sat down on the sand beside their bundles, mopping perspiration from faces and necks.

"Bill, when I get up and stand in front of you, look past me at the sharp peak just south of the mountain — the first one on the ridge straight before us. Tell me if you see anything that might be a reflection of the sun — from a telescope, we'll say; or more likely a pair of field glasses. No, don't look yet. Remember that with good glasses a man could read the expression on your face; read your lips, too, if he's had any training."

At the first sentence Bill's face had hardened.

"You don't have to preach caution to a man that's been on the dodge long as I have," he muttered bitterly, under cover of lighting a cigarette. "Shoot. What d' you think — that it's an officer, maybe?"

"I'm not thinking past the field glasses that I believe are focused on us," Abington parried, rising and standing so that his back was to the ridge while he held up his watch before Bill's face. "He may think I'm trying to hypnotize you, but it's an excuse. Look right past this watch, to a point between the second and third little pinnacles on the ridge. See anything?"

"Something moved in the notch just below that pinnacle. I got it against the sky for a minute. There ain't any shine, though. Might have been a sheep."

Abington put away his watch, stooped and shouldered his pack. Bill slipped his arms through the rope loops and wriggled his own burden into place on his back as he got up.

"Wouldn't think they'd be lookin' for me away down here," he said uneasily, after a few rods of silent plodding. "Not unless you ——" He sent an involuntary glance toward his companion.

"Unless I informed on you when I went after supplies, and arranged for your capture after I had benefited by your information," Abington answered the look. "You don't really think that, Bill."

"I don't know why I wouldn't think it, if somebody's planted up there watching for us with glasses," Bill retorted, not more than half in earnest but yielding to the ugly mood born of nerve strain and muscle fatigue.

"Of course, you can think any idiotic thing you choose," Abington retorted in that tolerant tone which he could summon when he wished to bite into a man's self-esteem. "Any other brilliant ideas on the subject, explaining why, if I were contemplating treachery, I should call your attention to that light on the ridge up there?"

"Yeah, I might have one or two," Bill growled. "I was a damn' fool to start across here in broad daylight. Now, if they come after me, I ain't even got a gun!"

Abington sent a quick, sidelong glance toward Bill's glowering face. That gun question was becoming a touchy subject between them.

"No, you haven't a gun, so you are not quite so liable to a few extra years — or a chair in the gas house — if you are caught."

"Well, I ain't caught yet!" Bill's upper lip lifted away from his teeth. "Not by a damn' sight!"

Abington gave him another sidelong glance. The snarl was not lost upon him, though he made no reply. Like many another man who is agreeable enough under ordinary circumstances, Bill Jonathan's good

nature did not always stand up under hardship. That blustery impatience at the physical discomforts of a long grilling walk was beginning to crop out in Bill, mostly in the form of a surly ill temper and a grumbling against conditions which neither could help. Abington had reached the point of gauging the exact degree of surliness and to set up mental defences against his moods.

Bill had taken the initiative in this quest, and he was surely receiving full value for his efforts. From a sporting admiration for Bill's daring and a certain liking for his whimsical shrewdness, Abington was consciously beginning to chafe at the man's crabbed temper; he felt a growing distrust, too, which was yet formless and only vaguely realized. He caught himself wishing now that he had asked Park what crime stood against Bill Jonathan. No use asking Bill; he would say what he pleased and the other could believe it or not.

"If you've got any wild idea of finding out from me where them stone skeletons is, and then turning me over to the sheriff, you better revise the notion, Professor," Bill said abruptly, having brooded over it for five minutes. "I'm nobody's fool."

"Then why talk like one?" Exhaustion was beginning to draw a white line beside Abington's nostrils, and his bruised ankle ached cruelly. He began to feel that he'd had enough of Bill's grousing.

"You've nothing to kick about, so shut up. I'm doing packer's work rather than have men along who might go out and betray you."

"Yeah. You knew damn' well I wouldn't stir a foot if you brought in a bunch of mouthy roughnecks," Bill growled back. "How do I know what you framed in town?"

Abington slipped his pack off his shoulders and swung toward Bill with a menacing glitter in his eyes.

"That's going a bit strong, even for you," he said sharply. "If you've any reason for saying that, out with it! If not, I'll thank you to keep such thoughts behind your teeth. You're getting quite as much as you are giving, Bill Jonathan — and by that I mean to include loyalty and fair play.

"For all I know, you invented the story of fossilized human remains as a temptation that would insure my protection and the food you'd need in case you made your escape from Park. Do you suppose I was so blind I did not see that possibility from the start? A fossilized man, as you knew, was bait I'd be pretty sure to swallow. Well, I did swallow it — but not with my eyes shut, I assure you. Please give me credit for that much intelligence.

"I took you at your word, and I have played the game straight. I shall continue to play it square, until I find that you have lied to me."

He waited, balanced, ready for the blow he fully

expected. Instead, he saw the expression in Bill's eyes change to a grudging mollification, as if the very abusiveness of the attack reassured him.

"I never said anything to put you on your ear," Bill hedged morosely, after an uncomfortable pause. "What the hell are you razzing me for? I said I wouldn't be caught, and I won't be. That goes, Professor."

"Very well, let's have no more talk about it." Abington lifted his pack to his galled shoulders and started on, leaving Bill to his own devices; wherefore Bill presently overtook him and walked alongside.

The truce held while the clouds flamed with the sunset, a barbaric pageant accentuating the sanguine magnificence of that wild ensemble of towering hills slashed with deep gorges whose openings were frequently hidden away behind bold, jutting pinnacles.

"Looks like the devil was practising on these hills, trying to make a world of his own with nothing but fire for building material," Bill observed at last, wanting to appear friendly, and awed in spite of himself before the spectacle. "When God came along and told him to knock off, looks like the devil just kicked it all to thunder and dragged his feet through the mess a few times, and walked off and left it like that. Don't you think so, Professor?"

"I've heard theories advanced that were not half so plausible," Abington replied, his voice once more

calm and slightly ironic, as if he still doubted Bill's sincerity. "A man could spend a lifetime in this country without exhausting its archæological possibilities."

"Yeah — or without getting caught," Bill added, speaking, as had the other, of the thing nearest his own heart.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"LET'S SEE IF I AM SMARTER THAN THE DEVIL"

THEY entered a narrow, straight-walled gorge with loose, sandy bottom and every indication that ages ago it had been a watercourse with the floods of glacial rainfall sluicing down to the valley. Presently Bill, ploughing laboriously ahead to a certain spring he remembered in a cave up this ravine, gave a grunt and stopped short. In the peculiar, amethystine veil of the afterglow which lay upon the hills like a cunning stage effect of colored lights, he pointed a finger stiffly to a certain mark in the sand. Abington limped forward and joined him.

"I see the gosh-awful is here ahead of us," he said listlessly. "Well, it will be obliged to wreck us personally this time, Bill, since all our worldly goods are literally on our backs. We may get a sight of it at last."

"That all you care?" Bill stared at him. "Maybe I'd feel that way about it, too, if I had a gun to defend myself with. You're making a big mistake, Professor. You'll see it before you're through."

"Possibly." Abington's tone was skeptical. "How far is it to the spring?"

Bill did not reply. He was still staring at the strange, sharp-toed tracks that were too large for any sheep one could imagine, yet not shaped like cattle tracks, nor much resembling the elk they had discussed last night. Blurred though they were in the fine sand, they were yet easily distinguishable as being the same hoofprints they had seen across the valley. The tracks did not look very fresh, and after a brief study of them Abington took the lead, perhaps because he was armed and Bill was not. Presently Abington stopped and pointed to a cleft in the rocks.

"Whatever it is, it turned out of the gorge and went up there," he said. "Pretty good climbing, even for a sheep."

"I'll go ahead and show you the spring," Bill volunteered, and Abington chuckled to himself. Bill looked back at him with sullen eyes.

"All right for you, Professor — with two guns handy," he said resentfully. "Put you in here with just your bare hands and maybe you wouldn't be so damn' nervy, yourself."

"I'd probably wait until I saw some danger before I became alarmed," Abington jibed.

Bill muttered something under his breath, and stepped out more briskly. Both were thirsty, but since they had left the western side of the valley with one canteen nearly full, the need of water had not yet become acute. It was the tramp across the valley with

packs too heavy for them that had told on the tempers of the two men — with Abington's bruised foot and Bill's nervous dread of pursuit for good measure.

The spring proved to be well protected, in a water-worn cave that seemed to offer excellent shelter. A tangle of nondescript oak bushes grew near the entrance and drew moisture from the overflow which, though slight, was yet sufficient for the scant vegetation. The cave itself was not large, with a fine sandy floor and a lofty, arched roof of irregular blocks of the red sandstone which was the regular formation of these hills, though a lime dyke broke through here and there in sharp peaks and ridges in a fairly continuous outcropping, roughly pointing toward the river.

Abington slipped off his pack, drank from the spring and sat down against the wall of the cave to unlace his boot from the lame foot. Bill began gathering dry twigs and branches and set about making coffee and frying a little bacon.

"We oughta git a sheep or something," he grumbled, breaking a long, moody silence. "This time of year there's generally sheep running in through here."

"I'll take a hunt, when my foot has had a rest. We can manage for a day or two," Abington replied, without looking up.

"Say, you'd be in a hell of a fix if you broke your leg," Bill sneered. "You'd starve to death before you'd trust me with a gun, wouldn't you?"

"There's meat for to-night — to-morrow will take care of itself."

"Yeah, maybe it will — and it'll leave us to do the same," Bill retorted. "What the heck are you scared of, Professor?"

"Nothing at all. Not even your 'gosh-awful.' Will you fill that corn can with water for me, Bill? I'll try a cold compress on the foot."

Bill did as he was requested, and a sight of the discolored foot stirred him to sympathy. Abington, he suddenly saw, must have suffered cruelly all day, though he hadn't said anything about it. Bill remembered too that Abington had remained awake all last night while he himself had slept. But it was not Bill's way to apologize. Only ——

"That's a hell of a looking foot!" he growled. "Hot water beats cold. After supper I'll heat a can of water ——"

"After supper I'm going to sleep," Abington rebuffed him. "Cold water will do."

"Have it your way — it's your foot," snapped Bill, and relapsed into his morose silence.

It was not an agreeable supper, and neither spoke while they drank their coffee and ate bacon and fried corn from the same frying pan.

Bill was tired and full of uneasy fears, and he bitterly resented Abington's action in regard to the guns. He was accustomed to the feel of a gun's weight

against his hip, and the thought of facing an unknown danger without a weapon gave him an uncomfortable feeling of helplessness. Add mystery to the hazard, and Bill reacted with a dread not far removed from panic.

Abington ate and drank his share, then forced himself to explore the cave with a torch and choose for himself a niche in one side of the wall near the entrance, where he would hear any intruder and would still be fairly well concealed.

At least, that was his idea when he settled himself in the recess. As a matter of fact, not even his aching foot could keep him awake. He dropped almost at once into the deep, dreamless sleep of exhaustion, and when he opened his eyes it was to see the sunlight slanting into the cave — a circumstance which at first convinced him that it must be nearly noon, since the cave opening faced the south and the canyon walls were high. But after a brief space of mental laxity, his mind snapped into alertness. He remembered that he had stooped to enter the cavern, though the sunlight bathed the high-arched roof just over his head and brought into relief certain symbols — left there by the ancients, he had no doubt.

For a time he lay looking up at the roof, deciphering each crude character, his eyes tracing the lines which even in that sheltered place showed the erosion of countless centuries. Some of the carvings were

dimmed; none retained the sharp outlines left by the engravers.

Now he knew that the cave had a high opening through which the sun was shining; a common occurrence in that old formation that had suffered the buffetings of wind and water for millions of years, and moreover had been rocked and twisted by many a primeval earthquake. He thought no more of the opening, but insensibly slipped under the spell of those ancient records, his imagination thrilling to each new sign as it caught his roving eye.

The story of a journey was depicted there — a journey of death, he judged from certain priestly emblems and the sign of burial. Perhaps they had attempted to depict the journey of the soul, though he could only guess at that, his speculations revolving around a figure of a dog or wolf, very similar to the jackal which, in the belief of ancient Egypt, was supposed to carry souls across the desert to paradise. He wondered, searching farther along the roof for further inscriptions.

Like an old rangeman riding up to a herd of strange cattle and unconsciously reading the brands and mentally identifying the owners, Abington could not seem to pull his mind away from that roof. Beyond the sunlit patch the carvings extended into obscurity so deep that stare as he would he could not distinguish the lines. A sense of bafflement nagged at him. Just

as the cattleman will follow a range animal for half a mile, seeking the vague satisfaction of knowing what brand had been burned into its hide, Abington sat up and put on his boots, picked up the can of carbide and miner's lamp which he used in preference to candles, when exploring dark caverns, and started climbing up a tilted shelf of rock that offered a precarious footing for a man tall enough to bridge certain places where the shelf had dropped completely away and left gaps in what may once have been a steep, narrow trail.

From the floor of the cave it looked impossible for anything save a fly or a lizard to climb to the roof, and when he started Abington had not expected to do more than reach a point from where he could view the shadowed writings at closer range. But he kept going, while the lame foot protested with twinges of pain that gradually ceased as the muscles limbered. And presently he stood on a low irregular balcony, the writings just over his head.

This was something he had not suspected, even while lying on his back studying the roof. He made his way along the ledge, forced to stoop so that he was soon walking like a gorilla with his hands sometimes touching the balcony floor. He became suddenly aware of an odd variation in the rough sandstone. The sharp, granular formation was worn down to a dull smoothness in the center of the ledge

where he walked; a pathway polished with many shuffling feet — nothing else.

He turned a corner and peered into blackness; an ancient water channel, no doubt. He lighted a match, saw that the hieroglyphics continued along the wall, and waiting only long enough to light the carbide lamp, he set off along the narrow passage, pausing now and then to study the inscriptions as he went.

Broad chambers receded into blackness beyond the white light of his lamp, and these he hastily explored before going on. Labyrinthine passageways were revealed as he turned the light this way and that, each opening inscribed with strange symbols carved in the rock at the sides.

"A gold mine of records!" Abington exclaimed to himself in the voiceless whisper that was his habit when alone. "The ancient people who lived here seem to have had a Scribblers Club of very active members! An ancient catacomb, or I'm mistaken. That, or else these symbols were carved with the express purpose of misleading one —— Hm — mm — an attempt to confuse the devil and thwart him in his search for the soul of the dead! Now here's a pretty problem for an archæologist. Let's see if I am smarter than the devil!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE POOL OF EVIL DEATH

JOHN ABINGTON thought fairly well of himself and he felt certain that these misleading characters could not prevent him from finding the way to the actual burial place. For one thing, he discovered that many of the passages (a miner would have called them drifts) had been hacked out by hand, with stone hammers and wedges. How long and arduous a task that had been, he could only conjecture. In several of the drifts he found implements to prove his theory, but after a glance or two that identified them with the early people he had been tracing, he went on and left the implements lying there for the present, knowing that he could return at any time and get them if he wished to do so.

It cost him several fruitless trips down long, winding ways that finally ended in blank walls, before he learned to mistrust the man-made passageways, which had evidently been cunningly constructed to deceive the devil himself — and any other unwelcome intruder.

He began to study more carefully the carvings placed at the openings of these zigzag passages, but

after a while he was forced to admit to himself that he could make nothing of them. So far as he could determine with a cursory examination, they all looked much alike, though he knew there must be some secret differentiation. He could only avoid such corridors as seemed to him the work of human hands, and go on.

That going on was not the simple thing it sounds. Many times he was forced to crawl on hands and knees along an old water channel with fine, red sand packed hard and smooth — and at such times he caught himself looking for human footprints. That he found nothing of the kind in the old water channels seemed to him a proof that the ancient ones had traversed these black passages before the time of copious rainfall, else the sand would not have been so smooth and untrodden. Frequently he was forced to climb up through crevices where the rocks were worn glossy — always, wherever rock lay underfoot, the same smoothness prevailed — until it seemed to him that he must soon emerge upon the crest of the high-turreted ridge which formed that wall of the canyon.

After a time that to Abington had been timeless, so absorbed was he in the fascinating quest of a final destination which these signs seemed to promise, he was recalled to practical things by the dimming of his carbide lamp. He held it close to his ear and shook it, but heard no sloshing sound in the small water com-

partment above the carbide. He moved the tiny lever that permitted the water to leak drop by drop down over the lumps of carbide to form the acetyline gas which burned with a clear white light until water or carbide (or both) were exhausted and the gas ceased to form, but the flame still burned feebly and threatened to go out altogether.

Abington glanced at his wrist watch and gave a low whistle. No wonder the lamp was going out! His watch said that the hour was eleven thirty-five, though he would have sworn it was crazy if the lamp had not begun to fail. He must have been prowling in here for three or four hours. That was as long as the lamp would burn with one filling of water. Last evening he had wanted to make sure of a steady light in case they were disturbed during the night, and he had put in fresh carbide and filled the small tank with water just before going to bed.

"Damned idiot — brought the carbide can along, and no extra water!" he anathematized his carelessness.

But after all he was not so culpable, for he had intended to use the lamp for only a few moments, to study the carvings on the cave roof. The can of carbide, lying beside the lamp, had gone into his pocket from force of habit; a good habit too — if only he had slipped the quart canteen over his shoulder. But Abington's work had taught him to manage com-

fortably with very little water — and who would burden himself with a canteen when he was merely going to climb fifteen or twenty feet?

He shut off the lamp entirely, since it was folly to waste the flame while he sat there thinking over the unpleasant predicament which his scientific zeal had let him in for. That little cat-claw of light might serve to help him over a bad place, he reflected — and as he sat there, he could recall several places which he would not care to negotiate in the dark. Furthermore, there had been trickles of water in some of the passages, and one cavern held a pool.

It occurred to him that Bill would probably be worried. It was the first time he had thought of Bill since he started this strange underground journey, and he remembered now that he had not seen Bill in the cave when he left it that morning. "He'll think the 'gosh-awful' got me in the night," he grinned to himself.

He hated to go back without having discovered the secret of these writings, but common sense told him that the thorough exploration of this place was likely to take some little time. The problem now was to find his way back to the cave. He had little doubt that he could retrace his steps, though he realized that it would be slow work, feeling his way along in the dark as he would be compelled to do, unless he found water.

He stood up, stooping under the low roof, and stared unseeingly into the blackness whence he had

come, trying to recall the nearest point where he could find water. Some little distance back, he knew. He had been climbing considerably in the last half hour or more, and the walls were dry. Well, he would have to help out with matches until he found water enough to fill his lamp. An inveterate smoker, he had a fair supply of matches; and now he lighted one and tucked it under the little lamp switch, so that he could have the benefit of the blaze down the full length of the wood.

That first match having helped him down a rough channel where the boulders were trickily piled, he felt his way along the wall as far as he dared go before lighting another. So, walking in alternate darkness and light, he made his way for some distance.

Inevitably the time arrived when he paused, hesitating between a left-hand turn and a right, with a black hole directly in front of him. It cost him two matches to decide that he knew none of these passages; that he had not come this way at all.

He was about to retrace his steps to a point where he was sure of the landmarks when, far away, he heard the faint drip, drip, drip of water falling on rock. At first, standing there in black silence save for the intermittent tinkling, he could not tell where the sound came from. But by walking a few feet down each passage he eliminated first the left passage and then the right, and so went straight ahead down a

gentle incline with roof so high that a match flame failed to reveal it, and so narrow that his shoulders brushed the walls on either side as he walked. A natural fissure running through the hill, he judged it to be an old watercourse; the ridge seemed honeycombed with them.

That particular match having burnt itself out, Abington walked on in darkness, frankly relieved at the near prospect of water. He was willing now to admit to himself that he was very thirsty, and that the hunger gnawing at his stomach could be easier borne if he had a drink. It would be a relief, too, to have a decent light once more, and he promised himself grimly that this time he would not loiter along studying hieroglyphics as he went. They could wait until he came in again, prepared to explore the place thoroughly and chalk the different turnings so there could be no blundering in the future. So, thinking of future precautions, he stumbled over the lip of a small precipice and fell headlong into water.

He came up spluttering sentences which might have surprised Bill who had found him always controlled in his speech. He fumbled for the edge of the pool, found it and hung on with one hand while he explored with the other for room to lift himself out on the rock. Grimly he clung to the lamp which was doubly vital to him now, and when he had made shift to crawl out, he turned and sat with his legs dangling

in water to his knees while he prepared to fill his lamp.

"Well, I wanted water," he chuckled when his first startled rage had passed and he was smoothing the water out of his wet beard. "Sooner or later we do get what we want, I've noticed, even though the manner of getting is often unexpected." With the lamp cap opened, he leaned and dipped the lamp in the water, feeling for the depth.

Abington's nerves were scarcely more susceptible than steel wires, but the Stygian blackness and the silence, broken only by that tinkling drip, drip, drip, began to press rather heavily upon his consciousness. In spite of himself his fingers shook and fumbled the simple mechanism which provided for lighting the lamp with a spark when matches were not available — as his emphatically were not, after their involuntary bath.

He whirred the little wheel again and again before he succeeded in striking a spark that would ignite the gas, and exhaled a long breath of gratitude when the slender white flame suddenly sprang into life. Solicitously he coaxed it into a brighter radiance and turned its full beam upward, looking for the spot where he had walked over the edge of the fissure. When he found it his mouth sagged open.

"Call this hole a teapot, and I'd say I fell down the spout," he grunted. "A pretty problem — getting out again."

In truth the problem was not pretty, but instead was as ugly a situation as John Abington had ever found himself in. The place was not unlike a huge teapot with bulging sides and the fissure for a spout. How deep the water was in the pool he could only guess; considerably over six feet, he knew, because he had taken a dive of about fifteen feet and he did not remember that he touched bottom at all. As to the diameter of the pool, that too was a matter of conjecture, since the light did not show the farther rim.

He leaned over, dropped a wet match into the water and watched it, edging along the rim of the pool as the match floated gently away from the side where he had fallen in. Abington's eyes brightened.

"Thought there was a current," he nodded confirmation. "Some outlet, of course. Some inlet, as well. This pool never filled drop by drop."

Carefully guarding his lamp, he worked his way along, following the match. So he saw it hesitate, poise and sway like something grown suddenly fearful, then up-end and disappear under water as if invisible fingers had reached up and seized it. Abington leaned far over, flung another match into the water and saw it disappear as the first had done. He dropped his hand into the water, let the fingers dangle passively, and felt the nagging pull of the undertow. The hope of leaving the cavern by following the outlet of the pool died before it had gained more than a

flutter of life. For the water flowed out by a subterranean channel which no man could follow.

Abington continued around the pool, turning the lamp this way and that upon water and walls. The place was not unlike a huge cistern, roughly round and slowly drying up, judging from certain marks on the rock rim which in places sloped steeply toward the water. Presently he discovered the inlet, a small stream running down through a crack in the wall which gave no hope whatever of getting out that way. It was here that the tinkly drip fell into the pool from a finger of rock thrust out of the fissure.

Even in his urgent need of finding his way back to the surface, his scientific mind ruled Abington, for he caught himself turning the lamp rays back for a second look at hieroglyphics carved high up on the wall.

"What the deuce!" he muttered. "That can mean nothing but evil — much evil — and the death of many. Aztec and Egyptian — not burial but death, and an evil death at that. Death to many — repeated over there. Well, the carvers were here, that's certain. Couldn't have come in as I came. Hm-mm——"

He went on, stepping across the fissure where the water flowed in, and keeping to the bank rim which widened as he proceeded. But although the walls rose roughly perpendicular with here an outward bulge, there a falling back to a steep incline, there was

visible no passage nor even a split save where the water came sliding down the fissure that was no more than a seam. And all along the wall, high up wherever a smooth surface offered, there were the carvings, with little variation in their sinister portent; the great chain of evil, and the death of many.

CHAPTER NINE

ABINGTON FACES TREACHERY

TWICE Abington circled the pool, pausing often to scan the carvings and to look up at the place where he had made his unexpected entrance. A real jump-off, that; more than twice the height of a tall man, and no possibility of climbing back unless one had a rope. The water had undoubtedly saved him a nasty fall. As a means of escape, Abington gave it up and turned his attention to the places where the walls slanted up into blackness. He was standing thoughtfully considering his next move — a matter that would bear thought! — when he was startled by an explosive report, muffled by distance but nevertheless unmistakably a gunshot.

Something approaching a spasm of rage at his helplessness shook Abington and passed, leaving him again calculating and outwardly calm. The sound could not have come down the fissure from which he had fallen — he had come too far along a straight passage before he reached the three forks for an outside noise to penetrate to him there. The sound might have come down the narrow inlet to the pool, but Abington dismissed that possibility, probably be-

cause it was of no use to him, since he could not very well worm his way through an eight-inch crevice.

There must be some opening in the room. If not, then one good archæologist was likely to be counted a martyr to science and finally forgotten — his own bones eventually becoming mere fossilized relics, perhaps.

"Cheerful prospect, by Jove!" he grunted, as he turned his back on the inlet and began to examine the walls with the speculative eye of a steeple jack. Now that he was fairly sure that the surface was near, Abington did find a place where it looked possible for an athlete to climb up — at least as far as the light illumined the walls.

He was resolved that there must be no more carelessness. Before he left the pool, he took the precaution of emptying the carbide lumps from the can into his handkerchief, and filling the can with water. The tight-fitting top served to keep the water from leaking into his pocket, though he stowed the carbide in another for safety's sake. All but one lump, which he put into the lamp — leaving himself in the dark for a minute or two. But with the lamp dry and warm the tiny flint wheel sparked at the first attempt, and the white tongue of flame shot out in friendly fashion that brought the ghost of a smile to Abington's lips. Even then he waited long enough to refill the lamp with water before rising to begin the hazardous

climb — which, after all, might net him nothing unless it were a broken bone or two if he lost his footing and fell again.

But Abington's work had given him the sureness of a mountain goat. He took off his necktie, tied it like a bandeau around his head, hooked the lamp securely in its fabric and began to climb, resolutely pushing far from him the thought of failure.

How far he went he did not know. All he was certain of was the impossibility of going back. There were times when he hung by a slender foothold and risked his neck while he rested his hands. There were other times when he was almost ready to give it up; almost — never wholly — beaten.

"By Jove, this is a high mountain!" he gasped once when, having found a fairly comfortable perch on a knob of rock the size of a barrel, he very gingerly removed the lamp from his forehead and took a more comprehensive survey of his immediate surroundings and the wall above him. "I'll swear I've climbed ten miles!" Which was of course a very unscientific assertion to make. He capped it at once by another. "Bet I've passed a dozen lateral fissures on the way up."

Having relieved the tension somewhat by that gloomy statement, he slowly turned himself about and illumined with white light an arched opening in the wall that half faced him around the curve of the cavern.

"I'll be damned!" breathed John Abington; but what he really meant was, "Thank God!"

The six feet of sheer wall which stood between his perch and the mouth of the passageway balked him for a time, until he saw that the rock immediately above the opening broke smoothly for several feet, even with the face of the wall, while the rock floor of the tunnel extended outward over the black abyss from which he had just climbed; like a pursed lip thrust out from an open mouth, he thought.

Upon that narrow platform he fixed his gaze, shrewdly measuring the width of the extension. He would have to climb above the opening and drop down to the outthrust lip, trusting to good fortune to keep his balance and not pitch headlong into the cavern.

For a long minute he stood face to face with this fresh ordeal, the lamplight sliding back and forth, halting to contemplate a feasible niche for his feet, stealing upward to find some splinter or seam where the fingers could clutch.

Foot by foot he planned it, while he gathered his last reserve of strength for this supreme effort. Once he started there could be no going back. He must work above the smooth stretch where at some time in the past a huge fragment of wall had fallen away, and then edge sidewise until he was directly over the lip of the tunnel.

After that he must let go all holds and drop. If

he landed on the lip and stayed there he would at least have a chance. If not — the evil death of a certainty would be his; for even if he landed uninjured in the pool, he would never be able to repeat that terrific climb. He knew that he would not even attempt it.

Doggedly, with that persistence which characterized the man, Abington began the ascent; reached the exact point which he had planned to reach, drew one long breath in the full knowledge that it might be his last, and dropped. The impact of solid rock upon his boot soles jarred him as he flung himself forward and fell face downward on the floor of the passage.

When Abington came to himself he was in darkness, the lamp having fallen on its side and gone out. Whether he had been stunned, fainted, or merely lost consciousness for a moment he could not tell, nor did he ponder it much. The fact that his toes hung over the edge sent him crawling forward on his hands and knees, obeying the primal instinct of self-preservation. He wanted no more of that gloomy abyss, and until he had put several yards between himself and what seemed to him now a black, bottomless void, he did not think of the lamp.

When he finally forced himself to stop and light it, he discovered that he was in a fairly level passage, the walls covered with carvings wherein the same chain of

evil predominated. These hieroglyphics won only a cursory glance, however, as he got painfully upon his feet and started forward, steadying himself against the wall as he went.

A cool breath of air in his face was his first intimation that he was nearing the outdoor world. In spite of a stiffness in his joints and muscles, he found himself moving almost at a run, and the consciousness of his nervous haste brought a faint grin of amusement to his face. John Abington was more anxious to see daylight than he ever had been in his life — and the first man to laugh over the experience would be John Abington himself.

Nevertheless he did not slacken his pace until he arrived at a sharp turning where a gray light dimmed the white flame of his lamp.

He stopped before a crack twice the width of his palm through which the dawn wind came blowing gratefully in his face. Directly across from him, but fifty feet lower and separated by a hundred-foot chasm, a broad ridge extended out into the valley, and as he looked two bighorn sheep came trotting up a faint trail and disappeared among the higher crags.

"That's where the shooting took place," Abington told himself. "Wonder if Bill's been hunting. Took my rifle — have to give it back. Well — at least I can see daylight!"

The lazy clouds above the valley blossomed sud-

denly into radiant hues. The gaunt hills blushed and the canyons all seemed bathed in blood and yellow flames. As through the narrow window of a belfry tower Abington gazed down on a world of magnificent peaks and crags flaunting their bold reds and yellows beneath a redder sunrise.

For a moment the scene held him, then he turned back to the problem of finding a way out; for although a glimpse of the outside world was heartening, he could not squeeze through an eight-inch split in the rock. There must be some other way. He turned from the window and went on.

The passage took another twist and he entered a roughly outlined room into which the daylight seeped through several fissures between the shattered blocks of sandstone; high overhead, most of them were, although two or three were low enough to serve as narrow windows. A square boulder, the top hollowed in the shape of a rounded trough, stood in the center of the chamber; otherwise the room was empty, unless the intricate mass of carved symbols might be classed as furnishings — for the walls were covered with them.

Abington's spirits rose, though he paid little attention to the writings. To him they proved, as did the boulder which he recognized as a sacrificial altar, that this was a chamber much used by the ancients. Since the route by which he had entered could not be called

a thoroughfare, there would be another way out — possibly several.

Within two minutes he had found the passage — and something else. There on the rock floor which slanted down from the chamber on the side opposite the one by which he had entered, was a cigarette stub; one of the oval kind he himself always smoked. He stooped and picked it up, his black eyebrows lifted in surprise.

"Never reached this point yesterday — hm-mm. Bill not only borrowed my gun and went hunting last night, but did a little exploring on his own account. Looking for me, perhaps. No — Bill was scouting around for himself. Hm-mm — growing surly and quarrelsome — pretending a distrust he can't actually feel, hoping I'd give him an excuse to turn on me. Wonder, now, if Bill didn't raid his own cave and hide the stuff. A full burro-load of grub — with gun and ammunition he could live all winter — hm-mm — looking now for a hide-out — place where I can't find him! Bill, my lad, you should pay more attention to details; one little oversight — such as a cigarette stub — has hanged a man before now. A good inch and a half of tobacco wasted here. You'll be wanting a cigarette very badly, Bill, before you get another supply, remember."

He laid the stub down where he had found it and went on, haggard eyes peering this way and that, seek-

ing further signs of the traitor's presence. If Bill had been looking for his partner, then it was an odd twist of circumstance that had sent them both wandering around in the same labyrinth of caves and complicated passageways without once permitting them to meet. If, on the other hand, Bill had been hunting a hiding place which Abington would never find — and the archæologist was certain this was the case — he had a surprise in store.

Just now Abington wanted most of all to get out of there and find his way back to their camp, where there should be food. If not — well, he had his Luger, he had seen game, and he was a fairly accurate shot. He would not starve.

The passage sharply descended, as so many others had done. Abington went cautiously, lighting both walls and watching for obscure openings which for all he knew might be the one he should take. This whole country seemed to have been the playground of Vulcan, who rent mountains asunder, twisted whole ranges of hills and broke them into fragments and flung them aside when fresh land appeared above the great Sonora Sea and caught his sportive fancy.

Just here the shattered formation of the old volcanic fissure lay in blocks that had been roughly hewn into the crude semblance of steps, down which Abington went slowly, choosing his footing with the deliberation of excessive weariness. His thirty-six-hour fast

and that terrific climb up from the Pool of Evil Death — from the writings he had so named the place — had taken more out of him than he realized until he began to negotiate this rather difficult descent. But he kept going, that cigarette stub serving now to urge him forward.

Stumbling from hunger and weariness, Abington finally emerged into another cavern of considerable extent and showing unmistakable signs of human occupancy in bygone ages. Crude pots — most of them broken — stood against the walls. Stone implements of various kinds, all thickly covered with dust, lay scattered about; and on the dust-strewn floor the plain imprints of hiking boots. Bill, then, had visited this cavern, which proved that so far Abington had kept to the right trail.

Tilting the lamp so that the light shone on the floor, he went forward, following the boot tracks in the dust. Through winding passages they led him — Abington might have become lost again had not those footprints pointed the way — and so into a chamber where was piled a little heap of things which Abington recognized as a part of his own outfit and the things Bill had declared were stolen from his cave across the valley.

The treachery of the act stabbed through Abington's weary consciousness and merged into a malicious satisfaction. At any rate, the spot had been well

chosen, for here was water trickling down a rift in the wall, tinkling into a tiny basin hewn out of the rock by other hands than Bill's.

Abington sank to his knees and drank thirstily, then clawed at the pile of stuff, found a tin of corned beef and cut it open with his knife. It was not what he would have chosen for a meal, but it would serve — there was plenty of water at hand. He ate all of the corned beef, drank again, and withdrew to a sandy niche where he felt fairly sure of hearing Bill if he returned; then he laid himself down under a shelving projection of rock, put out his lamp and went thankfully to sleep.

CHAPTER TEN

"SINCE YOU'RE THE KILLING KIND ——"

REFRESHED, Abington awoke with a sunbeam shining fair in his eyes. Just at first he failed to orient himself and thought he was in the cave with Bill. But this cavern was larger and the crevices high up on the wall between the broken masses of rock let in a westering sun and a breeze straight off the desert. He was hungry again, and the salt beef had given him a burning thirst.

He wondered if Bill had returned while he slept. It was quite likely, he thought, and having no wish to be discovered just yet, he crept very slowly from his place of concealment, careful to keep in the shadows beneath the jutting wall. For some time he waited and listened, but the only sounds he heard were the tinkling of the little spring and the shrill chirping of a few cedar birds that had made their home in the crannies of the roof and were very busy with their own small affairs.

Abington grinned to himself as he cautiously approached the little pile of supplies and began a more careful investigation than he had attempted that morning. Two pounds of chewing tobacco — most convincingly had Bill bewailed the loss of those plugs, he

remembered. Half a dozen cans of corned beef, one of the variations in diet which had been made possible by having three pack burros. Had Bill really thought he could make Abington believe that the "gosh-awful" had carried off chewing tobacco and corned beef in cans? In the face of their loss of the burros, Abington had not given much thought to the missing articles from Bill's outfit. He had visited the cave, viewed the apparent aimlessness of the demolition, had looked for tracks, and having found the giant sheep tracks in the bottom of the canyon, paid no more attention to the wreckage.

"Bill must have hurried back across the valley after this stuff — no, certain details contradict that. He must have carried all this stuff on his back, along with what I gave him. Not very bulky — he could have concealed it all in his pack, easily enough. Pretty heavy load it would make — no wonder Bill was grouchy! Took advantage of the 'gosh-awful's' work and held out a few supplies on me. Clever — but then, the sheriff's experience with Bill should have warned me to be on the lookout for tricks."

He helped himself to what food he could stow in his pockets, breakfasted on another can of corned beef, took a long drink at the spring and refilled his carbide lamp before he started out again. His plans had changed altogether since he discovered the food cache. He no longer wanted to get back to the cave

where he and Bill had camped, for he did not believe that Bill would be there, nor any of the supplies, and if there were fossilized human skeletons in this region, he felt that he would find them just as easily without Bill.

The way out of this particular cavern led him down through another crevice, blocky and splintered as if the whole peak had been twisted asunder; and for the greater part of the distance it was open to the sky. There were places where it would even have been possible for a man to climb up out of the crevice. But the day was too far gone and Abington had no intention of spending another night underground in aimless wanderings, nor to roost on some dangerous pinnacle until morning.

He emerged at last on a narrow ridge that stood like the crest of a huge, petrified wave between the peak he was leaving and another not quite so high. Intuitively he identified it as the ridge he had dubbed the rooster's comb — and knew that if he were right he must have come a long way underground. For the cave where he and Bill had spent the night together, and from which he had started on his subterranean journey, was considerably more than half a mile from the ridge where he had seen the light.

Again the high peaks were gilded with sunlight while the lower slopes glowed blood-red and the deeper shadows merged into warm purple. No artist

would ever have dared to mix those barbaric colors, even for a desert sunset; and if he had dared his hand must have lacked the cunning of the Master Painter who daily wrought his magic here on these wild hills where men so seldom ventured.

Abington looked down a sheer wall of rock to a deep basin where grass grew, and a round pool of water held like a mirror the rose-tinted reflection of the cloud straight overhead. One steep trail led down the farther hillside to the pool and as he gazed a mountain sheep went bounding up that trail. On the brink of the pool stood a man foreshortened to the height of a boy. He seemed to be staring after the sheep.

"Bill! Oh, Bill!" Abington shouted between cupped hands. For the moment he had quite forgotten Bill's treachery, in his human reaction to the sight of a familiar figure after the ordeal he had just passed through. "Oh, Bill! *Hey!*"

The man's face was upturned, staring. Then he raised his rifle and fired pointblank at Abington. The bullet struck a rock close by, ricocheted and nicked Abington across the forearm.

"You poisonous reptile!" snarled Abington, and whipped out his Luger. At his first shot the figure went sprawling; tried to get up, fell back and lay still. Abington watched him, a bit heartsick over the excellence of his shot. He had never taken much to

the manly sport of planting leaden pellets in living bodies, but since his work took him into the wild places of the world he had learned to shoot straight because it seemed to him a necessary accomplishment, and straight shooting made an enormous saving in ammunition.

"You would have it," he grunted remorsefully. "Any jury would agree that my life is of more use to the world than yours — and since you are the killing kind ——"

Down in the basin the wounded man struggled to hands and knees and began crawling; slowly, stopping every moment or two; going on, creeping in an aimless circle most horrible to watch.

An oath voiced at random jarred out of Abington's throat. He half raised the Luger, lowered it, shook his head. He couldn't do it. But neither could he leave man or animal crawling blindly, aimlessly around until he died. He looked again and turned away, sickened at that creeping, groping, stricken thing hemmed in by the blood-red rocks that rimmed the basin.

Without any clear purpose Abington started off down the ridge, looking for some break in the cliff that separated him from the basin by a scant two hundred feet. He had no doubt that Bill Jonathan was done for; the Luger is a wicked weapon, and the range was short.

But when in the dusk he came slipping and sliding down an old sheep trail long since abandoned for a more favored path, there was no wounded man to be seen in the little basin. Like a shot quail that flutters for a moment among the bushes and then is instantly lost, he had somehow managed to crawl away and disappear.

Abington called Bill's name again and again while he lighted the carbide lamp. And as the white light sprang out and drove back the shadows, a gunshot roared just under the cliff for answer to his hail.

As he leaped sidewise, Abington shut off the lamp, then rushed the spot where the gun had flashed. By good luck he spied the vague bulk just as the rifle was being painfully lifted for another shot, snatched at the barrel and wrenched the gun free — by the feeble resistance of the other gauging shrewdly his waning strength.

"Venomous kind of snake, aren't you?" Abington observed with pitying contempt, as he leaned the rifle against the cliff and started to relight the lamp.

The flame flared up. Abington stooped, gave a shocked exclamation as he started back, recovered himself and stooped again. The man was not Bill Jonathan but a gaunt old fellow with high cheek bones and a straight gash of a mouth drawing an evil line through his grizzled beard. A total stranger, wounded and collapsed against the cliff; beaten and

utterly passive now, like a trapped animal that will not move unless it sees some chance of escape.

"By Jove, I'm glad it wasn't Bill, at any rate!" Abington ejaculated, as he knelt to make a superficial examination. "Shot through the side," he diagnosed to himself. "Well below the heart. Serious enough, but by no means fatal with the proper care — and that is going to be something of a problem under existing conditions. Might better have made a clean job of it — glad I didn't, though.

"Well," he asked aloud, "where's your camp? If it doesn't involve too much climbing, I'll try and get you home." He waited while the old man's eyes remained fixed on him with a baleful stare. "Doesn't understand, maybe. Looks like one of these synthetic Americans."

He tried French, German and a passable Italian, keenly watching the eyes that never once changed their homicidal glare. He sat back on his heels and studied the glowering face with less personal emotion than he would have displayed before an odd pattern of the Maya death mask, and decided that the man had understood his first question well enough and was merely stubborn.

"Of course, if you want to lie here all night, that's your privilege, I suppose," Abington said finally, standing up and glancing around at the confining walls of the dusk-filled basin. He turned the light again on

the old man's forbidding countenance, made more sinister by the pain he was suffering.

"Are your field glasses equipped with night lenses?" he asked abruptly, and silently laughed at the startled wavering of those colorless eyes.

"Thought so! Now, since you do understand plain English, let me urge you to tell me where I'll find your camp. Of course you have one — you're too well nourished and too well dressed to be living off the country. You won't talk? Then you are likely to catch cold in that wound, lying out here all night. And I can assure you that a bullet wound — especially in the body — can give plenty of trouble if neglected."

The thin, vindictive mouth clamped shut in that thick, unkempt beard might have been dumb for all the sound that issued from it.

Abington rose and went seeking here and there with the light, hoping to discover some sign of a camp, or at least a trail that would lead to one. He did not succeed, but he did find the field glasses where they had been dropped or cannily hidden under a bush where they might have been overlooked if the light had not brought a reflection from the lenses. He was looking them over when, from up on the ridge where the sheep had disappeared, a voice that could belong to no man save Bill shouted anxiously:

"Hullo! That you down there, Professor?"

Abington swung the lamp toward the sound, mov-

ing it three times up and down, the signal to advance which they had found convenient in old caves and tunnels where a shout might bring down upon their heads a small avalanche of loose rock.

"Was that you shooting? Yuh hurt?"

"Come on down, Bill," Abington called. "There's a path, if you can find it in the dark." And as an afterthought, "No, I'm not hurt."

Good old Bill, to ask that question with just that demanding note of worry in his voice! Abington remembered what he had been thinking when he pulled and aimed his Luger, and he had the conscience to blush for the thought. Of course Bill was no traitor! His eager, hurried voice betrayed long hours of frantic searching in that maze of narrow gorges that twisted and turned and criss-crossed so bewilderingly.

Abington smiled under his beard as he listened to the clattering of small rocks on the hillside beyond the pool. And presently Bill Jonathan's familiar figure — never had Abington seen a more welcome sight! — came lurching into the light zone, half running, with that little swing of the shoulders that told of full-blooded strength.

"My Lord, Professor, I've been runnin' these hills like a rabid kit fox, lookin' for you!" he panted, laying both hands on Abington's shoulders and giving him an affectionate shake or two. "Why, you damned old vinegarone, I've been scared to look off a

cliff or into a pothole for fear I'd see a coyote sneakin' away from your ornery carcass! Thought sure that 'gosh-awful' thing had got yuh!" He stopped to breathe. "Who was doing that shootin'? You?"

Abington nodded, a bit surprised at the lump in his throat which prevented speech.

"Shootin' at the 'gosh-awful'? Juh git it?" Bill's voice dropped to a vengeful whisper as he sent a wholly involuntary glance behind him.

"No, Bill, I didn't. Some one down here took a shot at me, and I shot back. He's lying over here by the cliff."

"Yeah?" Astonishment pulled Bill's hand off the other's shoulder. "Who do yuh reckon — was it an officer?" An indefinable change had crept into his voice.

"No, I don't think so. He isn't dead yet. Come over and take a look. We'll have to do something — get him into a shelter of some kind. These nights are too chilly for a wounded man to lie out unprotected."

Once more Abington was calm and cool and efficient. He turned and led the way back to the wounded man, Bill Jonathan following at his heels quite as if there had been neither quarrel nor separation to jar them out of the routine of the trail.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"HUNT YOUR OWN ADAMSES!"

BILL got up off his knees, glanced this way and that as though looking for something of which he stood in urgent need, and turned a bleak gaze again upon the huddled figure on the ground.

"We better get a fire started," he said to Abington, unconsciously taking the initiative, as if this was his own particular affair and he alone must acquit himself well in the emergency. "I'll scout around with the light — maybe I can find a cave — his camp if it's down in here. Don't suppose he'll jar loose any information ——"

He continued to stare down at the man, his underjaw thrust out and in his face a certain implacable hardness that brought him a second puzzled glance from Abington.

"Where's your camp?" he hissed abruptly.

The man seemed to draw himself together as if he feared a blow. The murderous eyes flinched away from Bill's relentless stare.

"Find out — if you think — you can!" he snarled.

"Oh, I'll find it — don't you worry a minute," Bill hissed in his face. "If necessary you'll tell where it is."

"I won't tell you. You can go ahead — kill me — be done with it ——" the wounded man defied him weakly.

"Who, me?" The savage bitterness of Bill's laugh was a revelation to Abington. "Me kill you? I should sa-ay not! You mind what I told you two years ago, Jack. That still goes. Don't think you can die and duck out from under that way. I'll nurse you like a sick baby! You'll get well — see? Well enough to travel, anyway."

He turned abruptly away as if he would not trust himself to say more.

Presently a fire was crackling beside the cliff, and Bill had brought water in his hat for Abington's use in cleansing the wound.

"Fix him up best you can, Professor. Then if you can make out with the fire for light, I'll borrow the lamp and beat it over to where I cached our stuff. There's that first-aid kit we saved outa the wreck — I'll bring it and some grub. It ain't far. Just over the ridge — half a mile, maybe."

He drew Abington to one side out of hearing of the wounded man.

"That's Jack Huntley, Professor. He's got to be put in shape for the trip in to Vegas. It's a matter of life and death. So do what you can — I know you're a pretty good doctor when it comes to a pinch. I'll be right back. Well — hang onto him, Professor,

till I get back with the stuff. Don't let him sneak out on you!"

"If he does," said Abington grimly, "it will be because he sneaks into the next world. I'll try and not let that happen, Bill, my lad."

He stood watching the round zone of white light go dancing away and up the hill without any visible means of locomotion, since Bill walked behind it; slipping from rock to rock, pausing and poising here, flitting on again like Peter Pan's good fairy, Tinker Bell. A fantastic comparison in that wild glen where men of past ages had met for their wooing or their warring or to hide from strange beasts that roamed the valley; where even now the air seemed charged with a malignant kind of hate, and with fear that passed all reason — since the man called Jack Huntley had been assured of the best care they could possibly give him.

While Abington sat by the fire and waited for Bill, he felt the cold malevolence of the soul behind those staring eyes and the close-shut lips. Though the fancy did not trouble him, it seemed too that the shades of those savage ones of long ago hovered inquisitively in the shadows that fringed the firelight; timid wild folk who dared not walk boldly among these strange men of a later age, yet lingered, curious to see what grim drama was about to be played here where the stage was set with the somber trappings

more suited to an old Greek tragedy than an incident of everyday life.

The return of Bill, heavily burdened and with the white light dancing impishly before him, did not spoil the illusion but served instead to deepen it; for the crudely efficient surgery was completed in silence or in curt undertones that held a sinister quality of ominous reserve. The white light painted grotesque shadows on the brown sandstone cliff beside them — gigantic caricatures of men in grewsome pantomime that might have been the enactment of a torture scene, with two fiends performing demoniac rites over some luckless victim.

Bill afterward boiled coffee and mixed a bannock in which he stirred small fragments of cold fried bacon left over from his supper. Abington ate ravenously, and afterward the two smoked silently beside the fire, Jack Huntley lying wrapped in their two blankets.

As the Great Dipper tilted more and more toward the polestar, fever unlocked the stubborn lips of the wounded man and he muttered endlessly, his sordid secrets betrayed with pitiless repetition. All about millions in carnotite, he babbled, and how "they" would never get it away from him, because he was too smart for them; crazy talk, interrupted whenever Abington bent over him ministering to his comfort, doing what he could to allay the fever. Beside the

fire Bill Jonathan brooded, occasionally lifting his head to listen when the fellow's delirium seemed to take a different turn, or some movement roused him from his somber meditations.

Dawn was beginning to work its daily miracle on hills and sky when Bill replenished the fire and turned to Abington, sitting with lean fingers clasped around his bony knees and a cold pipe dangling from between his teeth.

"What do you think of the case, Professor? Think he'll get well, all right?" Bill's tone made the question seem only the preliminary to what was really in his mind.

Abington yawned.

"No reason why he shouldn't, Bill. I recovered the bullet, it's a clean wound and no vital organs were injured. He should get well without much trouble — if proper care is used."

Bill turned away without a word, though it was plain that his mind was full of troubled thoughts. They cooked breakfast and ate in silence. The wounded man had fallen asleep, with the sunlight softly warm on his blanketed shoulder. Once Bill turned his head and stared long at the man, then looked at Abington, lips parted for speech that after all was withheld. Abington lifted an eyebrow inquiringly, and Bill looked away.

"What's on your mind?" Abington asked finally,

setting down his empty cup. "They say confession is good for the soul."

"Yeah. So's a few other things. Come on over here on these rocks, Professor. That old possum is liable to be listenin'."

"I don't think so," Abington cheerfully disagreed, though he followed Bill to a pile of boulders some distance away where they could talk without disturbing the patient, or being overheard by him.

"Now, there's a question I'd like to ask yuh, Professor. Who did you think you was shootin' at last night, when you ventilated Jack Huntley's liver?"

Abington's lips twitched.

"At you, Bill."

"Yeah?" Bill's jaws stiffened. "Want another try?"

"No, I don't think so. This man has complicated matters, but he has also cleared up a few things for me."

"Yeah — and he'll clear up more — for me," Bill opined. "If it's a fair question, I'd like to know where you've been since yesterday."

"Well, not to relate all of my thrilling adventures, I have been wandering around through a series of caves, and in the course of time I found myself in a cavern in the top of that peak up there. I judge it to be the one where I saw the reflection of the sun on field glasses. While trying to find my way out of

there, I picked up a half-smoked cigarette — of the oval kind which I use."

"Yeah? One of the flat ones? Kinda back-tracked yourself, eh?"

"No-o — for the very good reason that I knew I had never been there before. I thought I had crossed your trail, Bill, my lad."

"Not mine, Professor." Bill shook his head. "I've been huntin' the hills over by our cave, lookin' for you. I was workin' over this way when I heard the shootin' last night."

"Yes. Well, a bit later I came across a cache of food taken from our outfit across the valley."

"The hell you did!" Bill started and nearly dropped his cigarette. "You sure?"

"Absolutely sure. I ate two cans of our Imperial corned beef — breakfast and dinner. I expected you to show up there, but of course you didn't. It would make a splendid hide-out, Bill. There's a spring, and cracks in the rock let in sunlight; a perfect retreat. Impossible to come at one from the rear ——" Abington paused and his shoulders moved involuntarily. He was thinking of the Pool of Evil Death. "I'll show you the place. When I am through in this country you'll find it useful, no doubt."

"Not unless Jack Huntley dies. If I can ever get him in somehow to the sheriff, I won't need to hide out in the hills. Unless," he added dubiously, "they

cinch me for that car I ran over the cliff." His eyes clouded. He had forgotten about the destruction of that car.

"I expect they'd hand me about five years for that," he added gloomily, after a pause. "Where's the way into that cave?"

"I'd have to lead you to the spot and show you. There's time enough. I shall want to go back and make a thorough examination of the place for science."

Bill looked up.

"I'll have to disappoint you about them stone men, Professor. I run acrost the canyon yesterday where the hole went into the cave. There's been a big slide in there. I couldn't tell within a hundred feet where the opening used to be. We'd have to tear down the whole mountain to find it."

Abington said nothing. Creeping into his mind again came suspicion. Had Bill ever known where there was such a cave? Surely that slide had chosen a most convenient time and place for Bill Jonathan!

"I know where it was," Bill said doggedly, as if he read the thought. "I can show you the slide — you can see it for yourself, Professor."

"My chief work is not collecting slides," Abington drawled. "Well, I must be getting back to my patient. If he's awake he may want to eat something." He rose, but Bill had not finished, it seemed. He re-

mained seated on the rock hunched over his cigarette and staring morosely across the little lake.

"So you think I lied to yuh. You think I've been stalling you along! That goes kinda tough, Professor. I've been dodgin' around in the hills — yes, sure I have! But I ain't going to dodge no more, and you can go to hell and hunt your own Adamses. You wait till I lead that bird in to the sheriff and make him come clean! It's him that'll take a ride to Carson — not me."

"And the car?" Abington asked softly, his beard hiding a smile.

"Aw, hell!" growled Bill, jerked back to harsh realities.

In his bitterness over the sudden frustration of his hopes, Abington would not speak a word of comfort. Not even the rich storehouse of ancient records in the labyrinth of caves could quite console him at the moment, his heart had been so set on taking back to his college a fossilized man of the Cretaceous period.

He walked moodily over to the makeshift bed of his patient and stared blankly. There was no patient. A shout brought Bill, and the two nosed along the cliff like hounds baffled over a warm trail suddenly wiped out with water.

Because the man had been obliged to crawl, it was manifestly impossible for him to get far. Even so, they were a good half hour in running him down, and

then it was the slight indentations of his knees in a skift of sand behind a bush that gave the clew.

Bill went down on all fours and disappeared. After a minute or two, Abington followed.

It might have been an oversized badger hole, so far as outward appearances went. Even in his haste the trained mind of Abington noted a cunning arrangement of rocks deliberately piled haphazard against the cliff at some time long past, as the twisted roots of old bushes and trees clinging and twining down through the dirt and filling interstices gave mute testimony.

Yet the rock pile was in reality a solid, arched covering for the sloped entrance to another cave, in the mouth of which Jack Huntley lay sweating with the pain of his wound, frenziedly malevolent as a rattler pinned under a rock.

Kneeling facing each other, with the wounded man gasping curses between them, Abington and Bill Jonathan locked glances; Abington's eyes coldly searching, Bill's defiant, hurt and trying to cover a certain wistfulness he would have denied with much profanity.

"He's got to clear me with the law!" Bill said between clinched jaws. "He's the only man on God's earth that can do it. He pulled the robbery they laid onto me, and if he don't come clean, I'll kill him inch by inch!"

Jack Huntley turned his head and sent a furtive glance to Bill's face; shifted his eyes to Abington's that were black as ebony and quite as hard; turned again to Bill and met a cold stare that shriveled his courage to whining cowardice.

"Don't you, Bill! I — I'm done for — you can't hurt a dying man — you wouldn't have the heart!"

"Oh, wouldn't I?" Bill's laugh was in itself a threat. "Say! I got about as much heart as them stone men we're after. You wait and see how much heart I've got for *you* — you dirty whelp!"

"It's murder!" Jack Huntley's voice rose to a shriek. "You wouldn't stand by and see him kill a man that — that's all shot up ——" His eyes turned glassily to Abington.

"Why shouldn't I?" Never had Abington's voice been more casually brutal. "You're going to die anyway, you know."

"Yeah, and you won't die so darned peaceful, either," Bill added darkly.

"Of course, you can save yourself a good deal of suffering," Abington pointed out in his calm, professional tone, "by writing a full confession. In that case, I should feel obliged to protect you from Bill's vengeful nature."

"It's worse than Injuns!" Huntley cried, his fear rising to panic.

"Not if you write the truth," Abington pointed out,

taking from an inner pocket a water-warped notebook. "Here's a fountain pen which may contain enough ink, unless you wax over-eloquent. Write the truth, Huntley. I'll take care of Bill."

"You'll have a hell of a time, Professor, if he don't clean his dirty soul right down to the bottom!"

"I'll have to be raised up," whined the sick man, darting furtive glances here and there, as if, even yet, he hoped by some miracle to escape.

"For legal purposes," Abington directed, holding Huntley up and giving Bill a quelling look, "begin like this: 'I, Jack Huntley, of sound mind — and of my own free will — do hereby confess — that on ——'"

It was Bill himself who named the date, snapping the words out with a savage click of the teeth.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"THEY'RE IN HERE SOMEWHERE, PROFESSOR"

HALTING, hating to set down in plain words the full extent of his guilt; driven to it by the relentless promptings of Bill, Jack Huntley wrote three precious pages that would make interesting reading for the county officials before he signed his name. Abington saw the teary warning of the pen going dry and dropping blots on the book, and hurriedly signed his name as a witness before all the ink ran out. The thing was done. Bill threw back his shoulders with an unconscious gesture of relief, and stepped away.

"Now, die and be damned to yuh!" he said, as he turned his back and walked off.

Abington looked after him, grinning.

"This is where he holes up, Bill. He should have a pretty fair equipment. Better explore around a little. I have carbide tied up in my handkerchief, if you need the lamp. But the place seems well lighted from above."

"Yeah, I'm sure goin' to look around. I believe he's the one poisoned our burros. I bet ——"

Abington looked up, got to his feet and started toward Bill, who had given a sudden bellowing whoop.

"Well, the dirty whelp!" Bill was balancing two large mescal stalks in his hands. Light they were as cork, tough as bamboo, large at the base as Bill's muscular leg above the knee. Three feet from the base of each was a foot rest lashed securely to the stalk.

"There's the 'gosh-awful'!" Bill stated, in the incredulous tone of one who can scarcely believe his own eyes. "Look at how them sticks is cut on the bottom, Professor! Sheep hoofs to a tee. Stilts! And that's how the thing took such long steps and got over the country so almighty mysterious!"

"Ingenious!" Abington declared, balancing the stilts in his hands before he stood them against the wall of the cave. "Simple too. I had a suspicion of some such thing, but dismissed it as impractical in so rough a country."

"I dunno. They're light as paper. They could be carried easy enough on rocky ground, and just used for sand and gravel." He paused. "Now I *know* he poisoned the burros. He seen your camp set up in plain sight, and come straddlin' over there. A feller can cover a lot of country on stilts, once he gets used to walking on them. I used to when I was a kid."

But Abington was not quite satisfied. There lacked the motive, and he spoke of it.

"If he had merely raided camps and carried off the supplies I could understand it. But this attempt at

terrorization, and the insane destruction of good food, does not come within the bounds of logic."

"Yeah, but you don't know that bird like I do. He's what God used for a pattern when he made the first drove of hogs. You mind all that talk last night? That about having millions in carnotite, and being richer than Rockefeller? Jack thinks he's got hold of something in here, and he's been trying to scare everybody off. Maybe he's got something worth holdin' onto and maybe he ain't. If he has, I sure feel I'm entitled to grab it!"

Abington was walking around the roomy chamber, flicking this thing and that thing with a glance, overlooking nothing. He stooped over a pile of whitish rock stained thickly with great blobs of bright yellow, selected a lump and looked up seeking an opening where the strongest light fell through. He went over and stood under the light, turning the rock this way and that while he examined it through a miner's glass.

"So this is his millions in carnotite!" he said contemptuously at last, tossing the sample to Bill, who caught it dexterously as a catcher cups palms for a ball. "More than one poor devil has been fooled by limonite. That's what this is, if I am not badly mistaken; a yellow ochre, resembling carnotite. There's your revenge, Bill. Go tell him his millions in carnotite are just a dream. Tell him it's limonite.

If he's greedy as you say, that will be punishment enough."

"Not when he thinks he's dying," Bill grumbled. "He won't give a darn. What's he flopping around like that for?" he asked sharply. "Something bite him, do you s'pose? If it did, it'll die," he stated sententiously.

Abington ran over to where Jack Huntley lay writhing on the ground. He could do nothing, with the primitive means at hand. Huntley had indeed been bitten — by death. Whether the wound had been more serious than Abington diagnosed it, or whether he had injured himself in crawling to the cave, they could not of course do more than guess. Within half an hour Jack Huntley lay dead on the floor of the cave.

"This means that I must go in and have a talk with the sheriff," Abington observed. "A mere formality, but one I prefer not to neglect. Want to come along, Bill? I'll pay them for the car, far as that goes."

"Yeah, I guess maybe I better go on in and have it over with. I'll pay you back in work, Professor, if you'll go ahead and settle for that darn car I wrecked. But don't let 'em stick you on the price of it. It wasn't worth more 'n two or three hundred dollars."

"I'm a fair judge of cars," Abington remarked. "It will be all right, Bill."

"Yeah. And when we come back in here with a

fresh outfit, Professor, we better bring along a couple of good muckers and some powder. I believe I can maybe locate the hole into that cave, if I can take my time and have some help. Or maybe we can find another way in there. We sure oughta come fixed to spend the whole winter in here. I found a lot more carvings I'd never saw before."

Abington laughed to himself, and clapped a hand down on Bill's shoulder.

"Bill, my lad, that's the true scientific spirit! You'll be an 'Adam Chaser' as long as you live, now you've started."

"Yeah," said Bill, staring around him at the encircling red hills. "They're in here somewhere, Professor. Eight feet tall and big accordin'. No foolin'. I seen 'em myself. Well, let's bury the dead and get ready and beat it. We want to get back in here while the weather holds."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A FRESH START

"You see, Bill, in this search for a fossilized man of the Cretaceous period the point at issue is not simply to find skeletal remains of the man himself, but to discover as well a sufficient variety of artifacts appertaining to human life at that remote period. I must be enabled to reconstruct that man's life and habits, his mental progress as evidenced by his religious belief and practices. I want to be able to prove how far he had groped forward after immortality. The artifacts are therefore of prime importance, secondary only to the human relics. And since I know where to go for them, I have decided to let the other wait for the present.

"To organize an expedition of sufficient size to start excavating the place where you believe a slide covers the cave where human fossils are to be found would be to hamper my work with impedimenta which I prefer to do without. Furthermore, I believe that I can find another way into your cave of specimens ——"

"Specimens? Say, they was men, I tell you! Stone Adamses eight feet high and big accordin',"

Bill Jonathan stipulated. "I'll swear to that, Professor. Course, if you've changed your mind about wantin' 'em, I've got nothing more to say. Not a darned word."

"I do want them," Abington explained, using patience because he knew Bill Jonathan's stubbornness. "We'll get at the stone men soon enough. But first I wish to assemble certain other evidence and prove certain other deductions. The finding of the actual skeletal remains themselves will come at the proper time, a fitting climax to the other work. I am willing to wait. I know they are in that series of caves, and I would much prefer to come at them through the channels used by the ancient people who placed them there."

"Well," said Bill, as he helped himself to a chew of tobacco, "I ain't prepared to say I found the only way into that cave of Adamses. I didn't look for it; didn't have time, for one thing. My light wasn't going to last long enough to explore around very much, and I didn't want to be left in the dark in any bunch of caves — no matter how well I might know 'em. Might be a dozen ways in. I didn't find any but the one I used, and that's covered up with a slide. My idea has been to have a bunch of Injuns dig in there, but of course if we can find a way that ain't closed up, that suits me down to the ground. I ain't crazy about having a bunch of them lazy Paiutes on the job, and

if we don't do any diggin' we don't need any Injuns. That's how I see it."

Abington smiled behind his beard.

"I doubt whether you could get an Indian within a mile of those caves, Bill. If we do any excavating we'll have to take in a crew of white men. No Indian could be forced to dig for human fossils, and that is why I have made no arrangement to hire Paiutes for the expedition; nor white men, for that matter. I have assembled a considerable amount of stores and equipment simply because I want no interruptions once I begin my research work again. You and I will go in alone, and I may as well say that I am not at present interested in any hypothetical crew of laborers."

"Hypothetical's right, if you mean white men," Bill grunted. "Take the average mucker and that's puttin' it mild. I wouldn't take a bunch of these hobo muckers into the Valley of Fire on a bet. I thought all the time you was goin' to hire Injuns. But if we ain't going to dig through that slide we don't need nobody at all."

"Certainly we don't. I've been waiting here for certain equipment to arrive, and it came on the stage to-day, so we can start in the morning. And remember, Bill, it is of the utmost importance to me that absolutely no one should get an inkling of the purpose of our trip, or our destination, once we leave here. We may be able to get away unobserved ——"

"Don't you never think we'll get away unobserved, Professor! But I've got 'em to thinkin' you're a goofy kinda gem hunter, so it's all right. They'll see us go, but they'll think we're after chalcedony or carnotite or something, so it don't matter."

Bill was right. Yucca Point was a dead little mining camp with nothing to think about save the business of those who occasionally drifted in from the outside world, outfitted at the general store and drifted out again.

Abington ignored gossip while he bought the largest supply of provisions which the storekeeper had sold in a year for the consumption of two men, but Yucca Point could not so disdainfully ignore John Abington. Eyes followed the wobbling procession of six burros, a mule and two horsemen that wound down the crooked street of the town and went snaking out of sight behind the Yucca-forested hill that gave the town its name.

The six burros and the mule were packed to their loose-flopping ears, and some of the packs bulged with mysterious things that had come in last night on the stage from Las Vegas. Yucca Point knew all about prospectors' outfits from having watched them go and come as the tide of fortune ebbed and flowed through the rugged hills at its back. It could sense failure or success in the way an old desert rat lifted his feet as he came plodding up the dusty road to the general

store. It did not take kindly to mystery and it stared resentfully after the John Abington Archæological Expedition of two men and nine animals threading silently into the hills without a word to any one.

They left a backwash of unfriendly conjecture behind them, so that Yucca Point was still talking about the queer outfit when Betsy O'Donovan drove her lop-eared old Ford crazily into town two days after Abington's departure and stopped with a bang so close to the hotel that her right running board tore a long splinter off the bottom step of the porch.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BETSY O'DONOVAN TAKES THE TRAIL

"WHOA! Hit something, didn't I? Holy Moses, get out and see how much hotel I've got under the Ford. You too, Jim Joe; pile out and get the grips into the office." She turned to the pale young woman beside her and smiled, dropping her hands from the wheel to her lap where they lay innocently clasped together. Betsy O'Donovan's smile was the strangest, sweetest, most impishly attractive smile ever achieved by a sandy-haired, sunburned woman of forty.

"Well, Jean, here we are, by the grace of God and by your old Aunt Betsy's driving. What do you think of it?"

"I don't know," Jean answered apathetically.

"You mean, you don't want to condemn it unheard," Betsy cannily supplemented the colorless statement. "Well, honey, you wait until you see the sun go down behind that range of mountains over there, and the purple comes creeping up this canyon to the hills beyond. When the Joshua palms over there stand at vespers in the shadows with their shaggy arms uplifted to the evening star in mute adoration — tell me what you think of it then, will you?"

For a moment longer she sat looking at her niece with that speculative half smile which seemed to hide more of her thoughts than it revealed. Suddenly she laughed, throwing back her head in a merry ha-ha that brought a grin even to the faces of the stolid Indians who had ridden bouncing in the rear seat of Betsy's Ford all the way from Tonopah. Even Jean Pattison smiled faintly, though she gave no other response to her aunt's poetic flight.

"Your old Aunt Betsy's turning sentimental! Hop out, child. You'll have a good rest to-night. They have good beds at this hotel, and a bathtub — though you wouldn't think it."

Jean struggled ineffectively with the Ford door until Betsy O'Donovan smoothed the difficulty by straddling out over the driver's side and coming around to jerk the latch in a certain way that released it. The girl staggered as she walked across the porch to a chair. Either she was weak from a recent illness or she was not a good traveler on rough trails, a bystander would have guessed. She sat down slackly and wiped her face with a dainty handkerchief which came away from her skin darkly gray with dust. While she stared incredulously at the handkerchief, her aunt came up to her, laughing.

"We had a following wind across that dry lake," she explained the dust. "Never mind, honey, it will wash off."

It was while she was browbeating the landlord into furnishing hot water for the bathtub that Betsy first heard of the strange outfit that had gone into the hills toward the river two days before.

"You ain't with that other party that just left, are yuh, Betsy?" the landlord quizzed. "Funny kinda feller they called a perfessor. Don't know what he's after in this country — some says he's out after sapphires and things, and some says he's lookin' up radium ore for somebody. I dunno, myself. Stayed here over a week, and I never got a word outa him about where he come from or what he's after." The landlord leaned confidentially over the counter where he kept the hotel register. "He acted like he was waitin' for somebody. All at once, up he gits and strikes out with a feller he called Bill. Now, here you come with two Injuns and your car loaded down with camp outfit — looks to me like you might be the one this feller was waitin' for. Ain't got wind of a big strike somewhere, have yuh, Betsy?"

Betsy laughed and turned away to meet the Indians who had come silently in with the luggage. The landlord leaned for a moment longer, grunted and took his arms off the counter, dully suspecting that Betsy O'Donovan did not want to talk about her plans.

At the store where she went to stock up with provisions she presently encountered the same covert interest in her errand to the country, and the same half-

resentful attitude toward the mysterious outfit which had just left.

"Can't give you Del Monte peaches," the storekeeper told her regretfully while he put up her order. "Fellow that left a couple of days ago bought me out. Only two men, but they packed seven burros with grub and stuff. Prospectors, I guess they were, but not the regular kind. Some say they're looking for carnotite ore——"

"Oh, will you look and see if I put down matches? I'll leave you to do the best you can. I must go and look after my niece who is strange to this country and has just gotten over a bad illness."

Jim Joe and Holy Moses squatted at the foot of the steps waiting for her with stolid faith that she would come. Never had they been disappointed in Betsy O'Donovan, nor seen her yield to man, desert or Ford. It did not occur to them that she could be beaten. Aloof, silently waiting her pleasure, they had seen her put difficulties and dangers to one side and go calmly on her way with that unconquerable little smile on her chronically sunburned face. They saw it now and rose impassively to do her bidding.

Betsy came to a halt before them, her hands still in her jacket pockets because she never wore gloves and had formed the habit of protecting her hands in the pockets of her old sweater.

"You boys had better cut your hair," she an-

nounced after a silent inspection. "Maybe no come back long time. You like-um short hair, you cut-um now."

"Aw righ'," said Jim Joe, who seemed to be the leader. "You bet."

"I've got the grub," Betsy went on. "Got burros. You pack-um early, when sun come up. You take-um trail to Whiterock Spring. You sabe Whiterock Spring?"

"Yeah," drawled Jim Joe. "W'iterock Spring. Yeah. We sabe. Burro two day come W'iterock."

"Yes. I stay here two days, my niece rest. In two days, I come to Whiterock Spring. You wait."

"Yeah. Aw righ'," Jim Joe placidly agreed. And he added inquiringly, "Tellum notting nobody?"

"Tell nothing. Here's money, you buyum tobacco."

Holy Moses received his share of coins in a brown palm, turned them over and looked at his mistress beseechingly, as a dog silently implores another tidbit from its master.

"Store-man got one fine red shirt," he hinted in a soft, melodious drawl. "Cost fi' dollah."

Betsy laughed with that little upward toss of her head that was so eloquent of unqualified merriment and gave more money to each of them.

"Buy yourselves red shirts, boys, but don't buy

moonshine! You hear me? No whisky, no home brew — plenty red shirt."

They grinned and nodded promises while they caressed the banknotes she had given them.

She watched them head straight for the store, walking with the swift, easy stride that marked them for men of the desert breed. They were good boys and they would obey her implicitly, she knew. It was that unquestioning obedience which she relied upon to take her triumphantly through the difficulties that beset the rough trail of a lady geologist and dabbler in mining prospects (chiefly of rare minerals); watching them go, her mind reverted to a matter that troubled her somewhat.

"Carnotite — tall, thin man with a beard. I wonder if he's out for the Strombergs? Two days' start — but it will take more than that to get ahead of Betsy!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"BAD PLACE, ALL THEM RED HILL"

"WELL," Betsy announced in a cheerful voice, "from here on we rough it." She had just driven the Ford up a long, gravelly wash that snaked away into the blood-red hills, and now she brought the boiling radiator up against a rock wall that barred further progress and stopped because she must; not even the Ford of Betsy O'Donovan was capable of vaulting a rock ten feet high.

Jean Pattison turned from staring silently at the garish tumult of crags and canyons which surrounded them on all sides, and gave her aunt a strange look.

"And what have we been doing, all this while?" she asked curiously.

"Pshaw, child! Two days away from a bathtub, and you think you've been roughing it! Wait until you've finished this little outing and are homeward bound, and you'll call Yucca Point a metropolis and Hoffman's hotel a palace. Now, here is where we park the car and go on afoot; though you shall have the privilege of riding a burro if you like. We'll just wait here until the boys overtake us, and in the meantime I think I should like a cup of tea. Did you ever

see anything more beautiful than the coloring on those hills over there?"

"It looks devilish, to me," said Jean, hesitating a bit over the word. "There's something about it — as if I had been here before and — as if something horrible had happened here. I can't quite explain it."

"The most horrible thing that could happen here is those fool Indian boys loitering along the trail and forgetting that the most of the camp outfit is packed on the burros," her Aunt Betsy retorted pettishly. "These red hills are fantastic, that's true, but there is nothing devilish about them that I see. I always found them beautiful and fascinating, with the secrets they hold locked away in these canyons; the secret of fortunes to be had for the finding, Jean." She stood beside the car and gazed out across the valley through the nick in the canyon wall which made the farther hills visible from where they were; like a framed picture done in blaring reds and yellows.

"There's one secret I mean to discover if it's humanly possible," she said, with a grim set to her jaw. "And if I do find it, Jean, you and I will have that trip around the world we've been talking about. Will you hand me that canteen there by your feet, and the kettle behind the front seat? We'll have our tea while we're waiting for the boys to come with the burros. If they took the short-cut trail as I told them they should be here soon."

The hours dragged through a long afternoon, and still the Indians failed to come plodding up the wash with the burros. The far hills seen through the gap turned a rich mulberry, darkened in the canyons where the shadows lay deepest. The nearer crags glowed red as new-shed blood. Even the gravel floor of the wash — a long dry river bed it was in reality — turned a rich crimson under the slant rays of the low-hanging sun.

Betsy O'Donovan's air of expectancy merged into a growing impatience and alarm. She had put away the tea things long ago and had pulled out a worn little book of leather that looked to Jean like a Bible until she caught the name of Homer on the cover. Even Betsy's beloved, blind poet could not hold her for long oblivious to the passing half hours, however. She began to glance at her gun-metal wrist watch whenever she turned a page, and at last she closed the book with a snap and got up from the rock where she had seated herself in the shade with her folded sweater for a cushion.

"Four o'clock, and the sun will be down in another hour!" she exclaimed. "What in the devil can be keeping those Indians? Jean, I'm going to walk back to where the trail debouches into this wash, and see if there's any sign of them. You may come along if you like, though I'd much rather you stayed here with the car. You'll have all the walking you want when

we go on to Sawtooth. You aren't afraid, are you, Jean?"

"Yes," said Jean in her laconic way that always puzzled her aunt, "of course I'm afraid. But that doesn't make any difference, Aunt Betsy; I'll stay if you really want me to."

"I don't want to tire you out, and I'm going back until I meet those devilish boys. I can't think what's keeping them, for they could follow the trail of the Ford in the dark if they were both stone blind! They should have been here two hours ago. There's absolutely no excuse for loitering in this manner, and I shall certainly tell them what I think of them when I see them!"

Jean turned and worried the unruly door latch open and climbed out.

"I think I shall go along too," she said. "I want very much to see what happens when the meeting takes place."

"Oh, you do! Well, your Aunt Betsy will probably make use of a few words — bring the canteen, then, if you're coming. Here, give it to me, child. I can carry it better than you." She had no smile for the girl as she took the canteen strap on one shoulder and set off down the wash with a swinging, purposeful stride that soon carried her far in advance of the girl in trim tweed knickers and jacket who found the loose red sand and the harsher gravel toilsome traveling.

No wonder the radiator of the Ford had bubbled and steamed all the way up the draw!

A mile of twisty creek bed, powder dry, with the erratic little furrows dug by the wheels of the car ploughing a trail of their own; no possibility of any one losing that trail, even in the dark. Two miles, and the crimson peaks glowed with a brighter hue in sharp contrast to the darkened hollows. A strange, unearthly radiance that seemed to palpitate with ethereal life stole into the valley. In the magic glow which holds the desert softly at sunset, even the bold shaggy Joshua palms assumed a tenuous quality of spectral unreality.

Beside the low point where a hill sloped steeply down to the gravel wash Betsy O'Donovan leaned against a boulder of red sandstone and waited until Jean came trudging down to her. The girl's face was drawn with fatigue though she had not walked more than a mile. But the gravel had made heavy going and her boots, laced to the knee, seemed soled with lead. Her aunt gave her one look and patted the rock beside her in wordless invitation which Jean accepted with a sigh of relief.

"Here's where the boys will come down into the wash," Betsy said briskly. "This old trail winds up the ridge and into a canyon until it dips over that notch in the mountain you see there behind you. It must have been made centuries ago by the Indians, on

their way down to the river from the desert. It isn't used much nowadays — I suppose because the Paiutes all drive Fords! — but the boys know the trail well enough. They should have reached this point three hours ago. I purposely gave them an hour's start, and I spent a good deal more time on the road than was necessary. You wait here and rest, Jean, while I go up the trail to where I can see it for miles. I won't be long — but in any case there's nothing in the world to harm you here."

Jean said nothing at all in reply, which was a strange habit she apparently had formed before ever she came out of the East. Her aunt gave her one further glance which had in it a hint of impatience, and went off up the hill to solve the mystery of the laggard Indians.

It was dusk when she came upon them — beside a spring of cool, clear water that seeped out of piled boulders and went trickling down to water a shallow depression in the canyon floor where grass grew in a matted carpet and low bushes rimmed the tiny oasis. A tiny fire twinkled like a star imprisoned among the rocks above the miniature meadow, and beside the fire crouched the Paiutes, muttering together over their cigarettes. The burros fed hungrily on the lush grass; they were ungainly, misshapen brutes, seen thus with the details of their bulky packs blurred in the gloom.

As Betsy topped the last little fold in the trail be-

yond which the spring lay sheltered, her booted foot struck against a little stick thrust upright in the trail, Jim Joe's bright blue handkerchief and Holy Moses' pink silk one loosely knotted around the top.

"What in the world!" She stopped short and stood staring at the gay flutter of soiled silk. Down below gleamed the fire, two vague figures dimly outlined beside it; lower still, the feeding burros. Betsy O'Donovan studied the scene before she went on — and when she came into the firelight the two vivid squares of silk were crushed negligently (contemptuously too) in her hand. The two Indians sprang up and stood looking at her with that unresponsive stolidity which masks so well the emotions of the red man. If they saw what she held crumpled in her hand they gave no sign.

"What are you stopping here for?" Betsy's voice was not shrewish, but it nevertheless carried a sharpness that stung. "I told you to go on down to the gravel wash and follow the car tracks from there. You sick?" She looked hardly from one to the other, but neither replied to the taunt.

"What's matter you? Jim Joe, why you stop here?"

"Das more better place," Jim Joe said sullenly. "Fine place for camp. Lots water, lots grass, mebby-so you camp this place."

"You get those burros and start down the trail!"

Betsy stood aside, then impulsively kicked the little fire apart, scattering the embers into the wet sand beside the rivulet. "Go! Heap crazy, you!"

Their sidelong glances met, clung during an appreciable moment of indecision. Jim Joe, older and bolder than Holy Moses, looked apologetically into the blazing eyes of his mistress.

"Them bad place for Indian," he reluctantly explained. "Them heap ghost place. No like-um Indian come there. More better camp this place."

"Nonsense! That papoose talk. Old woman talk. You get those burros and go where I tell you. Ghosts gone long time ago. No brave man afraid now. Beat it!"

They hesitated, still torn between superstition and their habit of obeying Betsy O'Donovan, who was a friend to all Indians and who paid big wages for little work.

"Them place where big ghost have powwow," Jim Joe further explained. "Damn' bad, all them red hill."

Abruptly Betsy threw back her head and laughed, while the Paiutes looked at each other dubiously.

"Pshaw!" she rallied them, her anger gone. "I show you ghosts all gone now. Hurry up, boys. Round up the burros and we go to camp."

"Damn' bad for Indian," Jim Joe muttered unconvinced, but he went for the burros, Holy Moses trailing close to his heels.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ABINGTON OBJECTS TO NEIGHBORS

THERE are, here and there throughout the primal lands of the earth, certain spots which have remained much as they were in the Pliocene a million years ago; except that some have gone barren that in those days were lush with semi-tropical verdure. Such a spot is Nevada.

In the days before the high Sierras pushed up through the crust of that primal land called Cascadia and made towering mountains of the low-lying hills that formed the backbone of that island in a waste of waters, man and beast were formed upon a larger scale than we of to-day can readily conceive. Then the mammoth and the elephant went lumbering up and down the Valley of Fire, hunted by the saber-toothed tiger. Then the giant men who are spoken of by the Paiutes in awed whispers lived and loved and fought for life and food, worshipped their gods in ways they had learned from stark terror of the elements they could neither control nor evade, and went their way as did the huge brutes that made of the land an uneasy dwelling place for man, however gigantic

he might be. That the men of those ancient days were giants John Abington firmly believed and meant to prove to all the world before he had finished his work in Nevada.

The Valley of Fire is not, as its name might imply, a fire-tortured land of volcanic residue. Instead, its sanguine crags grew slowly throughout the countless ages, the primary sandstone of igneous formation. So heavily charged with iron oxide it is that, save where a belt of limestone cuts through, even the dust of the valleys is red as flames. The gaunt hills that rim it like the shattered sides of a huge broken platter which still holds roughly its former shape are a study in reds of every hue and shade. In certain lights it is a breath-taking spectacle, and always its ways are made devious with sharp twistings and bewildering mazes through which the uninitiated must not attempt to walk alone. Its distances are deceptive, its general atmosphere is an impenetrable aloofness from the rest of the world; a deliberate withdrawal into silence and retrospection which reaches back and back into a dizzying vista of ages uncounted, uncomprehended by us of to-day as are the political issues which concern his father's welfare unknown to cradled babe. In a land called new, too new to have space for tradition, the Valley of Fire lies steeped in eternal calm, cradling its memories of mastodons and men, of history made and forgotten thousands of years ago.

To John Abington the valley of frozen flames was always fascinating. The secrets locked between its twisted lips nagged at him, waking or sleeping, tantalized and intrigued him, goading him to pry deeper into the past at which it hinted.

As he sat with his back against the middle spire of that great cockscomb ridge which Betsy O'Donovan had mentioned by its local name of Sawtooth, his imagination pictured vividly the scene as it must have looked a thousand centuries ago when the valley was carpeted with lush grass and giant ferns, the stark, red crags standing bold above the green. He visioned a herd of elephants winding down through the pass to the westward, coming to water perhaps at the lake whose dry bed made a polished dancing floor for the dust devils that whirled across it now, as they had done since the land went barren ten thousand years ago. He saw the saber-toothed tiger slipping out of a dark ravine to crouch beside the trail of the herd; young elephant would be a fine supper for one of those hungry brutes!

He saw, too, a little band of hunters going warily to the narrow gorge through which the elephant herd must pass or take a roundabout trail to the valley. Up the sheer cliff they scrambled — huge figures of men clad simply in skins of the beasts they had slain. At the top they took station behind great barricades of rocks weighing tons, whispering together, noting

the push of the wind against their faces, glad that it blew from up the trail so that the herd would not scent them.

They, too, must have seen the tiger, for one left his station and moved cautiously along the cliff, watching the movements of the slinking beast. It was farther down, where that little lone pinnacle thrust up from the floor of the valley. It was there the herd would pass — but first the hunters would take toll of it, rolling down the boulders they had carried to the edge. The tiger had not seen them yet. His nostrils wriggled, sniffed the air as he scented the elephants, and of man he took little account.

Down in the valley ranged — down in the valley ——

Abington blinked, moved his slack body to a more upright position, stared fixedly at the level stretch beneath the ridge and a half mile or so away.

His daydream was gone like a wisp of smoke blown skyward. Movement there was, but it was not the stealthy activity of the vanished life of long ago. The men down there were pygmies in size, running before another who followed with less speed so that the distance between the two in advance and the one who ran behind increased even as he watched them. While Abington had been staring away toward the farther mountains and dreaming of the past, this little drama of to-day had come out of a flat-floored canyon

at the foot of Sawtooth ridge and was being played down there before his unheeding eyes.

He had thought that he and Bill Jonathan were alone in the valley, but apparently they had neighbors of some kind. He had thought that this was to be a peaceful spot where he could pursue his quest unhampered by the curiosity of those who could not understand a man who delved for Truth and let the precious minerals hide where they would. Three men in the vicinity of his caves in Sawtooth were three reasons why Abington frowned as he lifted the field glasses to his eyes.

So he saw that the one running behind was waving a gun, evidently threatening the other two; and that they were taking long steps, making for the upper end of the valley in the hope, no doubt, of eluding their pursuer in the maze of canyons that reached long fingers back into a jutting, scored hill just a little way above Sawtooth. The fellow in the rear was being hopelessly left behind, and he stopped and fired four shots after the two while Abington watched him; without effect, so far as Abington could see. One little spurt of red dust he saw, showing where the bullet had struck, but the others must have gone wilder still, for they certainly failed to take effect on the men — unless it was in their minds and stimulated them to a faster gait.

Abington watched them scowlingly until the two had

disappeared and the shooter had turned back, ploughing rather disconsolately through the sand; a short person in high laced boots and baggy knickers under a gray sweater. Some mining man, Abington guessed, having trouble with his help.

Abington waited a while longer and climbed down the other side of the ridge to where Bill was cooking supper. There was no profit in resentment of the intrusion, he knew. He did not own the valley, much as he would like to have it to himself.

"We may have to move camp back into one of these caves, Bill," he announced without preface while they were eating. "I see we have neighbors just over the ridge. I had the pleasure of witnessing a running fight just now — mostly running. As it appeared to me from what little I saw of them, some one in authority was endeavoring to drive two fellows away at the point of a gun. While I watched he fired four shots after them and then turned back to the ridge. If our camp is discovered, my work is likely to be the subject of a good deal of curiosity."

"Well," said Bill, after a minute spent in buttering a biscuit, "I ain't a badger, to live in a burrow, Professor." He sent a comprehensive glance around the small basin with the pool at one side and grass where the burros fed. The two horses and three of the burros had been taken back to the nearest ranch and pastured there until they would be needed, but the

three remaining burros fed comfortably in the basin or browsed upon the bushes that covered one slope. "It's a darn good layout we got here," he added. "What do you care what's over the ridge? They ain't likely to run on to us."

Abington looked at him with a twinkle of amusement in his black eyes.

"Makes a difference whether you're on good terms with the sheriff or not, doesn't it, Bill? When we were here before you wouldn't have been so indifferent to the fact that we have neighbors."

Bill took the thrust good-naturedly and parried it with a grin.

"Yeah, sure it makes a difference. I ain't on the dodge now, that's why." Then he laughed. "Feller might think you was, though."

"I am, in a measure. I'm dodging publicity, Bill. A certain group of scientists I might name would cheerfully give a quarter's salary to find out what I am after in here, and the information would be the signal for a lot of scientific ridicule. They'd have me set down as a lunatic before ever they saw what I have already discovered. I'm playing a lone hand in this, and I'll admit I'm human enough to hold a grudge or two. Frankly, I'd burrow pretty deep before I'd permit any premature publicity concerning my work. That is why I outfitted in Yucca Point, Bill. So long as I went about the country studying carvings which

all the world could see, there was nothing to hide and a column or two of print did not matter. Now, however, conditions are altogether different." He leaned back and reached for his pipe. "I wish I knew what that chase meant, out there in the flat," he remarked, as he packed down the tobacco in the bowl. "It couldn't have been staged for my benefit — to draw me out into the open. It must have been a bona fide quarrel of some kind, and of course anything might have caused the trouble; some labor problem, perhaps. But who are they, do you suppose?"

"Search me, Professor. But there's one way of finding out, and if you don't need me in the morning I'll take my gun and go hunting. We could use some fresh meat, and maybe I could find out who's snooping around. Bunch of prospectors, most likely. Them birds is liable to light down anywhere."

Abington smoked for a while in silence.

"I think, Bill, I had better do the investigating myself. If it's some one who has got wind of my work here, I would be much more likely to detect their purpose than you would. I know the earmarks better. But that needn't hinder your hunting trip," he added, when he saw the disappointment in Bill's face. "We do need fresh meat, far as that goes. When I really get to work in the caves we won't have time for hunting."

They left it at that until morning.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BETSY O'DONOVAN PLAYS THE GAME

ABINGTON had no serious intention of moving his camp into a cave. Like Bill, he loved the sky and the feel of the open around him. The gloomy vault of a cavern, once his work in it was done, seemed altogether too much like a prison. He wanted no stone walls to keep grisly watch over his slumbers.

In the few days since they had unpacked there in the basin a comfortable camp had been established. Rock walls laid up around the tents made protection against the occasional high winds that swooped into the hollow with a great swirling, lifting motion that would soon have torn the tents loose from their deep-driven pegs. The openings faced the pool where the red pinnacles all about were reflected as in a mirror when the water was calm. The back was set close against the cliff with a cave opening near by — a snug camp where Abington hoped to assemble the facts which would revolutionize certain scientific beliefs concerning the beginning of civilization.

The mountain behind him — it was too imposing to be called a hill — seemed honeycombed with caverns and underground passages. In those he had already

passed through was material for months of study, and he had not begun to do any real exploration. He grinned to himself when he recalled that during most of the time he had spent underground, on his first visit to the valley, he had been chiefly concerned with finding a way out of the labyrinth. To copy and decipher the hieroglyphics on the walls he had encountered would take weeks of patient tabulation, but he meant to do that and more before he left the valley. He meant to have a map of those caves, a complete translation of the hieroglyphics, a catalogued collection of the artifacts he discovered and, crowning achievement, the actual bones (fossilized, to be sure, but human bones nevertheless) of at least one of the men who had lived here. Nothing could be accomplished by haste; he could afford to be patient, even deliberate, in making a beginning.

Wherefore, next morning he once more climbed the ridge of Sawtooth, found a way down to the valley floor, struck out briskly to where he had seen the chase, and found the tracks of the man who had turned back. In that bewildering mizmaze of canyons he might otherwise have searched for a week to no avail. As it was, within an hour he came upon Betsy O'Donovan and Jean, trying to bring some semblance of homey comfort to a camp which was mostly comprised of bundles and boxes. Abington's astonishment would scarcely have been greater had he sud-

denly confronted one of the ancient men whose bones he was seeking.

Betsy was busy driving tent stakes into the red sand with an axe while Jean passionately embraced a pole and endeavored to hold it upright. Both were flushed with their exertions and both stopped and faced Abington with something like consternation in their eyes. Abington's black eyes were frankly puzzled, but not so Betsy O'Donovan. After the first shock of seeing him standing there behind her she laughed — though she kept her hold on the axe, he noticed; and liked her the better for it, if the truth were known.

"Oh, good morning!" she cried in her cheerfulest voice. "Are you good at putting up tents?"

"Good morning," said Abington, lifting his hat. "Are you sure you want that tent put up? It seems to me that the location is not altogether desirable — if you will pardon me for saying so."

"Granted. But you see, it's desirable that we should have the tent up somewhere, and the combination of level spot and sand soft enough to drive stakes in proved irresistible. I'm aware that it's a quarter of a mile to water, and we are unprotected here from the wind, but as a matter of fact we had mighty little choice in the matter. This is where my Indians dumped the outfit, you see. And since the burros were allowed to make tracks for their home pasture,

my niece and I decided to get the tent up and stay where we are for the present."

"You were traveling through the valley, I take it. But you are some distance off the trail, I suppose you know." Under his careless manner he was studying her and the younger woman, and the burden of his thoughts was betrayed by the cynical gleam in his eyes. To himself he was thinking that this was a clever way of putting a spy on his work. Women — who would ever suspect that their helplessness was but a studied ruse to profit by his chivalry? They had even remembered to inject the romantic touch — they had sent a girl along to play upon his emotional side!

Abington smiled at the stupidity. He was not susceptible to a woman's wiles, but it was natural that those who did not know him well would suppose that he might be easily enamored; out here in the wilderness, especially. The older woman was shrewd as the devil, he suspected. She was the one who was doing the real work; the girl was merely bait, to insure his befriending them. So she had been playing to the gallery last night, after all; shooting at those Indians to make the play stronger! And this impossible site for a camp — could the stage have been set more artistically? Abington doubted it.

"No, we're not traveling through. We came in here to stay for a month — maybe longer. My niece was sent to me with broken-down nerves and weak

lungs, and I'm counting on the Valley of Fire to put new life into her body and new thoughts into her mind."

"Clever — but it won't work, old girl!" Abington thought it, but he believed that he had kept his thoughts to himself. What he said was, "I'll help you with the tent, of course."

"I wonder if you'd mind helping two lone women carry the outfit over nearer to the spring?" Betsy suggested, in what Abington considered a wheedling tone. "Jean and I were scouting for a camp site when the Indians unpacked the burros, hazed them off toward home and deserted us. We had found the place we wanted, but we decided that it's too much of an undertaking to try and move everything ourselves. If you'll help with the heavier stuff, we'll be the most grateful women in Nevada. Won't we, Jean?"

"No, Aunt Betsy, I'm certain we can manage alone very nicely," Jean made unexpected reply. "I should much rather not trouble the gentleman. I'm sure he's in a hurry, and there is nothing to detain him. We certainly don't need any help."

Betsy turned and gave the girl an amazed look. Jean's apathy had been getting on her nerves, and this sudden rebuff was as unaccountable as it was vehement. Jean was staring at Abington with a cold hostility in her eyes, and now she reinforced her dictum with plainer speech.

"We don't need any help, and as you must see we are not prepared to receive callers. Good morning!"

Abington's eyes narrowed even as his neck stiffened. His hand went perfunctorily to his hat brim in salute.

"Pardon my seeming intrusion. Good morning, ladies." And he walked away from them, not once looking back.

Betsy O'Donovan sank weakly down upon the collapsed tent, folded her sunburned hands in her soiled khaki lap and stared at her niece with her lips sagged apart. Hands in her sweater pockets, mouth closed tightly upon her teeth and lips pulled in, Jean stood glaring after John Abington with cold ferocity in her eyes.

"For the love of sweet sassafras," said Betsy in a hushed tone, "will you tell me why you did that?"

Her niece whirled upon her.

"Didn't you see how he sneered at you? When you told how the Indians ran off and left us he was calling you a liar with his eyes! Didn't you see that supercilious, cynical — that absolutely *despicable* smile? No wonder he wears a beard! I should, too, if I had as mean a mouth as that man has! Why, I wouldn't have him help with the camp — I couldn't *sleep* under a tent he put up!"

Betsy did not say anything for a few minutes, but finally she heaved a great sigh, rolled over on her knees and got up, with a hand to her back.

"Well," she said resignedly, "it wasn't his mouth I was interested in — it was his muscle. Furthermore, he's out for the Strombergs, looking for that carnotite I want to find. I know it now. I knew it the minute I saw that suspicious look in his eyes, and that's why I wanted to establish friendly relations with him. If you would watch your enemy, my child, you should keep him close to you. But that bit of strategy is ruined now, I suppose. You called me Betsy, and that, as the miners say, 'tipped him off.' There's only one Betsy in Nevada, my dear niece, and that's Betsy O'Donovan. No doubt the man has been warned to look out for Betsy, who would hear about the carnotite discovery as soon as they would — sooner, probably — and would be in the field looking for it.

"That's the man I heard about in Yucca Point, Jean. He outfitted there just before we did, with a pack train of six burros and an ex-convict, or something like that, for guide and helper. I've been hoping I'd run across him, and I meant to tell you to call me Aunt Eliza Adams. I was willing to use my unlamented husband's name for a good cause."

"But why, Aunt Betsy?" Jean's tensed body relaxed, for Abington had gone out of sight around a rocky hillock. "He can't keep you from looking for it, surely."

"Oh, he wouldn't shoot me, I suppose. But if

Strombergs are after that carnotite they certainly aren't going to encourage some one else to find it first. They'd much rather see their own salaried employees discover a valuable prospect than to be obliged to buy out the person who beat them to it. That's easy enough to understand, I should think." She sighed again as she stooped to straighten a guy rope. "It means our trip around the world, is all. If I can find that outcropping before he does, I can sell to the Stromberg people and get the cash. If he finds it, his man will locate the ground and deed it over to Strombergs for a few hundred dollars, and Betsy O'Donovan will continue to grubstake desert rats in the hope of some day being located on a good thing. Well, where do we go from here, Jean? Can we make your bluff good, do you think, and move our camp over to the spring? I've always made it a point to carry out whatever I undertake — and that glorified prospector will be back, you may be sure. He's as anxious to keep an eye on Betsy as Betsy is to keep an eye on him."

Jean gave an odd little laugh which seemed to give promise of certain sturdy qualities inherited from her intrepid aunt.

"What we can't carry we can drag, and what we can't drag we can take to pieces. That insufferable idiot is not going to smile at *me* like that again!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ABINGTON SETS THE STAGE

"WELL," Bill began with the easy familiarity born of camp life, "what did you find out, Professor? Think them scientific birds have got on your trail?"

Abington weighed his answer. While he would much prefer saying nothing at all about the two women a mile away beyond the ridge, there was no profit in keeping silence, and if left to himself Bill might turn chivalrous and offer his services to the ladies. They would ask nothing better, Abington suspected, than to make friends with his assistant who might divulge a good deal more than Abington himself would impart concerning his work. Abington decided to put up a fence before the danger (or the temptation, rather) presented itself to Bill.

"They have set two women on my trail, which I suppose they consider a failure-proof method of finding out what they want to know. I found them rather ostentatiously in need of masculine assistance — making a great show of attempting to set up a tent alone in a spot where the first high wind would be certain to blow it down and where no water may be found within a good half mile. A more impossible location for a camp would be hard to find."

"Where was the man? The one you saw shootin' at some fellers last night?"

Abington's lips curled in the smile which Jean had hated so much.

"That, I discovered, was the older one. Her niece called her Aunt Betsy, I remember. She looks quite capable of shooting a man, but her aim was poor last night. She told me her Indians had deserted her, after driving the burros away. Dressed in breeches and boots and sweater, with an old felt hat on her bobbed hair, she would easily pass for a man at a little distance. The niece affects the same general type of costume — more trim and becoming, however. As to the Indians running away, it looked more as if she were driving them away; else why should she shoot at them?

"Bill, my lad, the story won't hold water. That is the weakest point in the whole arrangement, in my opinion. The old, conventional excuse that she is here for her niece's health and was deserted by her camp tenders before the tent was set up — no, it's too much to swallow. Aunt Betsy should have thought of a better one than that!"

"Betsy — say, is she kinda smiley and red as a beet from the sun, and does she bawl you out like a college professor? If it's Betsy O'Donovan and she wants to find out anything, you can bet she'll do it. That old girl's about the go-gettinest lady there is in the

State. Don't know as I ever heard of a niece, so it might not be her."

"It probably is," Abington said drily. "Just who and what is she, Bill?"

"Well, sir, she's the widow of old Lucky Adams, that cleaned up better than a million in Tonopah and blowed in the bunch in San Francisco in about a year. He used to go around over the country and buy up prospects from fellows that couldn't go ahead and develop their claims themselves. Betsy always went around with him, seems like, and while he was skinnin' prospectors outa their claims, she was cookin' and scrubbin' and makin' them old desert rats think they was back home with their maws. Or if she didn't, that's the way they tell it now, and they say she's helped out more 'n one poor devil that was on the rocks.

"Adams, he got to gamblin' and drinkin' and finally she left him and got a divorce and took her own name of O'Donovan, and since then she's prospected some and grubstaked more old desert rats than you could count. She's made a little money at it, I guess, but what she makes she gives away, mostly. It's a darn shame she didn't quit her man when he was rich and coulda paid alimony. I don't know her myself, but I've heard of her all up and down the State. She lives in Goldfield mostly, but I guess she just travels around looking after her mines and keepin'

cases on booms — great boomer, Betsy is, from what I hear. Anybody turn up rich ore anywhere, and Betsy's about the first feller on the ground. Seems funny she'd come snoopin' around your work; mines are her long suit, Professor."

"Gamblers in mines will gamble in other things, Bill, my lad. She probably knows enough about geology to be able to check up on my work, and would therefore be a valuable agent in the field against me. You call her a boomer — this is merely a pending archæological boom and would appeal to her for its very novelty."

Bill studied that for a time.

"Well, Professor, what are you going to do about it? Being women, you can't run 'em off — anyway, Betsy O'Donovan ain't the runnin' kind."

"I intend to do just two things, Bill: leave them alone, and protect my notes and artifacts by keeping them in a place where they won't be likely to find them. All my work from now on will be done underground, and while I shall need you to help with the measuring and mapping, I must ask you to say nothing whatever about it, to them or to any one else who may happen along."

Bill's glance went to the cave near by, the entrance hidden by a clump of bushes.

"You going to use Jack Huntley's cave? I guess it's safe enough, but darned if I'd want to hole up in

a dead man's hide-out, Professor. I don't know as I believe in spooks — I guess I can safely say I don't take no stock in them. But if there should be any chance of the dead comin' back, I sure as hell could pick pleasanter spooks than old Jack Huntley would be. You and me splits the blanket right here, Professor, if that's what you've got in mind."

Abington grinned across at him.

"You can rest easy on that point," he said. "There's that cavern I told you about — series of caverns, rather — up in the peak above here. Ordinarily I should not choose that place for my workshop, but in view of your friend Betsy's sudden interest in this locality I'm going to make that my headquarters, with the camp down here as usual. I'll have you help me pack my equipment up there, Bill, right away to-day. From the ridge I can take it on to the cave, and even you need not know exactly where I am doing my office work. There will be considerable if I carry out my present plan, and it's of vital importance to me that no one shall have access to my notes and maps, or be tempted to carry off such artifacts as I may collect during my explorations."

"And how," asked Bill, while he doubtfully eyed the precipitous slope above them, "are you going to guard the stuff when you ain't there?"

"The ridge itself will stand guard, and it never sleeps. You must know, Bill, that your friend the

lady miner is not exactly built for much climbing. We'll clear out all this scientific equipment and papers and books, and then if they invade the basin here, we'll look like ordinary prospectors. Bill, you might even talk vaguely of carnotite. There is Jack Huntley's hoard of limonite samples to make the thing look plausible, and I doubt if Betsy would know the difference. Few prospectors do, as a matter of fact. The color seems to have a hypnotic effect upon their imaginations and if they do possess any knowledge of ores they blind themselves to the truth where carnotite is concerned."

"Yeah, you're right, Professor. I've seen men talk like they was millionaires one month, and wind up the next without a winter's grubstake or money enough to buy powder to shoot their brains out if they'd wanted to. That stuff Jack Huntley found here looked to me like carnotite, but I'll take your word that it ain't."

"Show some of those samples to the ladies if they call, and say we're prospectors. Now, we'll hustle this stuff up on the ridge out of the way of meddlers."

So was the stage set for Betsy O'Donovan whose knowledge of archæology ended with her college days eighteen years before, and who would merely have thrown back her head and laughed if Abington had told her what it was he was seeking.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

ENEMIES IN DISTRESS

ABINGTON leaned back in his striped canvas camp chair and lighted a cigarette, absently staring down upon the map fastened to the drawing board which lay across his lap. It had been a somewhat tedious task to plat his survey of the caves and passages already explored, but now that it was done he was glad that he had it all drawn out on paper where he could study the labyrinthine interior of the peak at his leisure.

He had not completed his explorations; he had not even found the main entrance, as it were. In two weeks, all that he had accomplished was the survey, with Bill's help, of the western side of the system, starting from the sandy-floored cave where he and Bill had spent their first night on this side of the valley six weeks before, when Bill was a fugitive from the law and he himself was more skeptical about this mountain than he should have been.

Starting from the opening in the roof of that insignificant cave, he and Bill had moved methodically into the blackness, Bill with a candle, chalk and chain, Abington with transit, more chalk, his book of field notes, his camera and plenty of flashlight and films.

Slow work, but fascinating as any man hunt Abington could imagine. Always there were the carvings on the walls: strange, intricate writings hacked into the rock by hands gone back to dust more centuries ago than Abington ever attempted to count. Even Bill began to recognize those symbols which were the simplest. The sun sign, the snake, certain priestly insignia, the four quarters of the moon.

One thing which struck conviction deep into the mind of John Abington was the unmistakable evidence of height; height and great strength beyond the strength of modern mortals. In his first hasty trip through some of these tunnels and caves he had been lost and searching for a way out. Then he had come upon narrow channels so low that he must stoop — must crawl upon hands and knees at times to make headway. Then he had not thought so much of size. Now, however, he was certain that those smaller passages had been water channels and had not been used by the big men who carved with painstaking expertness their records on sheer rock walls twelve or fifteen feet above the floor.

He had found that the man-made passages were seldom less than four feet wide, and that invariably the roof ran more than twelve feet from the floor. The stone hammers, the wedge-shaped picks were big and heavy — even Bill grunted when he lifted one and essayed a blow upon the wall.

Giants — can't mean anything else," he mumbled, while he stared down at the crazy network of lines, nearly all of them crooked, many of them doubling back upon themselves with unexpected intersections and numerous blind alleys that went nowhere at all. "Must have loved to dig — if they didn't, then they dug because they were forced to do it. Hm-mm — slave work, probably. If they were a white race, as I am firmly convinced, then they perhaps enslaved the Indians — if there were Indians at that time. Certain of the carvings seem to bear that out. When I have them all recorded I can go into that. Wel-l — months of work here. Months. Haven't begun to scratch this discovery yet."

As the light in the cavern began to dull he lifted the drawing board and set it carefully on end, face tilted to the wall. Methodically, yet with no thought given to the work, he moved here and there, setting his crude office into perfect order. Bill would be waiting supper, no doubt, and swearing because the meal was delayed. Two meals a day (they had fixed upon that plan as a time-saving device which gave them a full day for their work) surely did sharpen a man's appetite along late in the afternoon!

On this day, as on others when Abington was busy in his "office", making up his field notes, ready for the mapping of the caves, Bill was left to his own devices. To-day he had mentioned a foray into the

farther hills after a mountain sheep, but even so he would have returned hours ago; for Bill was no amateur hunter who would scour the trails during the heat of the day when all good mountain sheep are taking their siesta. Bill would hunt early and let it go at that.

Abington was thinking pleasantly of mountain sheep liver fried with bacon, when he left the cavern and made his way down the steep fissure which had seemed, when he first traveled it, so hazardous an exit from a cave where men had foregathered. Familiarity had smoothed the trail, however. He came clattering down through the crevice and out upon the ridge. At this point it was so narrow that he could stand in the center of the crest and look down either side; into the basin where was his camp with the smoke wafting upward and promising supper, or into the outer valley where he had seen Betsy O'Donovan chasing her Indians away at the point of her gun.

He was thinking that he would shout down and ask Bill if he got a sheep. But as he came leaping down over a rock at the mouth of the crevice, he brought up short before Betsy's niece, who confronted him with an automatic pistol clenched in her hand and thrust out at arm's length toward him. From the look in her eyes she was scared to the point of panic, and from the look of the gun it might spit bullets at him without a second's warning. Automatics are trickish

devices. One never knows when the gun is cocked and ready for action.

"What do you think you're doing with that gun?" blazed Abington as he swerved sharply to one side — though there was not much room for swerving in that narrow space.

"W-what do you mean, coming down at me like that?" The gun wabbled in her hand, sagged definitely as recognition drove the terror from her eyes. She backed a step and stood perilously close to the precipitous declivity behind her, of which she seemed either wholly unaware or to which she was indifferent while she glared at Abington.

"I didn't come down at you. I'd a perfect right to come down in any way I pleased, and if you had not been spying up here you wouldn't have had a scare."

"Spying! What an abominable thing to say!" Then she took up the more humiliating accusation. "I am *not* scared. You've absolutely no excuse for saying I was scared. Another minute and I'd have shot you ——"

"Simply because you were scared. Come away from that edge! Do you want to take a five-hundred-foot header into the basin?" Abington could not remember when he had been so thoroughly exasperated with any one. Of course she had been spying upon him, but because she was a woman he could not quite

bring himself to the point of calling her a liar, as he certainly would have done had she been a man.

She glanced hastily over her shoulder, gasped and moved toward the crevice. No other way remained for her to go, unless she walked out along the narrow ridge for possibly a hundred feet to where it widened into the smaller pinnacle, and that little ordeal was best accomplished in a calmer moment than now, as she must have felt. Certainly she did not want to explore farther that day, if one might judge by the longing glance she sent along the hogsback to the peak she had climbed to reach her present vantage point. But Abington misinterpreted her movement.

"I think I must call it forbidden ground from here on," he said coldly, edging over to block the entrance. "Sorry to seem discourteous, but when a woman enters a man's field of work, she must expect the treatment a man would expect when he trespasses upon another's property."

She flushed, but it was with anger, as her eyes plainly told him. Another glance went down along the giddy pathway to the other peak, but she seemed not quite ready to attempt to retreat that way.

"If this is your property," she said stiffly, "I'm very sorry I ever came up here in the first place. But you needn't think I want to run off with your carnotite mine, if that's what it is. Aunt Betsy might be curious to see it, but I don't know anything about it;

and don't want to know," she added for good measure. "I climbed up here for the view, and to put in the time while Aunt Betsy is prospecting." She gave him a long, hostile look. "I did think this was one place where I wouldn't be in danger of meeting you!" she flared, and spoiled the effect of her disdainful calm.

"And yet could get a fine view of anything or any one out in the valley," he said ironically, and glanced aside for a moment. "I haven't a doubt that your aunt——" He hung there on the word, staring out and below him.

A solid wall of dull red, deepening to brown near the earth, was rushing toward them. The dull roar, which he would have noticed long ago if he had not been so upset by the girl on the ridge at the very door of his hidden workshop, now beat upon his consciousness, brought him suddenly out of his anger toward her and showed him what impended.

"Here, quick!" He reached out and caught her by the arm, jerking her into the crevice as the wall of red sand hurled itself upon them from out the Valley of Fire. Had she been standing on the edge of the ridge where she had stood five minutes before, she would have been plunged into the basin; a fearful drop, he thought with a shudder. Every bone in her body would have been shattered when she struck.

Red sand swirled around the jutting rock behind which he held her. It filled their hair, clogged their

breath, made sight and speech impossible. Still gripping her arm he retreated up the boulder-strewn cleft, dragging her after him as best he could; fighting blindly, knowing that she was hanging back, paying no attention to her reluctance.

In a short elbow of the crevice where the tilted rocks roofed it over for a space of thirty feet or such a matter, he let go her arm and fumbled for his handkerchief, wiping sand from his eyes and mouth before he blinked at her with a faint, humorous grin which Bill knew well. She was blinking back, gasping with astonishment and dismay.

"A young cyclone," he said, his voice raised against the shriek of the wind. "I've heard of these desert sandstorms, but this is about the first real one I've encountered. At least, it's the worst. Well, you're in the crevice, after all."

"Not because I wanted to be," she retorted, with what spirit was possible. "This isn't going to last, I hope?"

Abington ventured a look down the open slope of the fissure and saw nothing but whirling red sand. The wind pouring over the ridge had the booming sound of a sizable cataract.

"Can't see anything outside," he reported. "Probably will blow itself out in half an hour or so. Our camp will be a nice mess, the way the sand is blowing into the basin."

That recalled the girl to her own affairs.

"My aunt started out prospecting, this morning," she said worriedly. "She thought I couldn't stand the hiking, so I stayed at camp. I didn't want to be a drag. I had promised her I would not lose sight of this Sawtooth ridge, so I — I climbed on top of it. For the view," she stipulated with a resentful glance toward the lord of the peak. "I don't care anything about your carnotite mine, except that I hope it is not the one my aunt is trying to find. I think she has a better right to it than you have. She has paid out quite a lot of money to men who tried to find it. Now you big mining men step in and act as if the earth was yours and the fullness thereof, and my aunt has no right in it whatever. I do hope she isn't out in this awful storm!"

She started down the crevice while Abington stood and watched her curiously. But almost immediately she came stumbling back again, groping along the wall with one arm flung up to shield her face.

"It's — frightful!" she gasped, leaning forward to peer at Abington. "I couldn't see a thing out there. What shall I do? Aunt Betsy must be out in it ——"

"Nothing gained by worrying," he told her brusquely, wondering if he were going to have a girl with hysterics on his hands. That, he thought, would be the crowning calamity in this unpleasant adventure. "Your aunt must be familiar with desert storms.

Probably she's more concerned over you than herself at this moment. She hunted shelter when she saw it coming, and will wait until the blow is over. That's all anybody can do."

To that she made no reply, but settled herself as comfortably as possible among the rocks, feeling with little questing movements of her hands in the dusk, like a blind person, Abington thought, as he watched her. At any rate she was not a chattering young woman, and for that he was thankful in a grudging, impatient way. Bad enough to have her there at all, but it would have been worse to have her gabbling incessantly or weeping or behaving in some other disagreeably feminine manner.

After a while he made his way down to the mouth of the cleft, felt the tremendous beat of the storm and heard its clamor as the wind hurled itself against the peak and spilled whooping over the ridge. To attempt crossing to the other peak would be madness; the footing was too precarious, the push of the gale too irresistible a force to combat except in dire need. Alone, he might have managed to crawl down that narrow pathway, though he would not have relished the feat and probably would in any case attempt it only as a last resort. As for the girl, she never could make the crossing except by some miracle of good luck.

No, the thing was impracticable. Wherefore he cursed the wind in sturdy man fashion and returned

to where she waited miserably in the bleak shelter of the rocky tunnel, shivering as the dust-laden wind whistled through the cleft, and sought her out where she cowered against the wall.

CHAPTER TWENTY

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

ABINGTON sat down and busied himself with a cigarette while he debated with his conscience. In the cavern was a comfortable camp chair, carbide lamps, even the cache of tinned food which Jack Huntley had stolen and hidden there on their first trip into the valley. There were several openings, to be sure, which would let in the wind which was growing colder; but he knew of passages that burrowed deeper into the peak where the air was warm and still.

It was possible for him to make the girl fairly comfortable while they were trapped here on the ridge — and that might be longer than he would care to admit. These cold wind storms of autumn sometimes lasted for days with no abating, as he well knew, when the air was thick with dust and fine sand, and traveling abroad a hazardous undertaking at best. True, this might be a squall that would soon subside, but Abington began to have serious doubts of its briefness, now that the cold, cutting quality of the wind began to make itself felt. Conscience told him to make the girl as comfortable as possible. But there was his suspicion of her. He was not at all

convinced that Jean Pattison had climbed the ridge merely for sake of the view, magnificent though it was in its splendid sweep of fantastic red hills. It seemed to him more likely that they had spied him going and coming along the ridge trail between the two peaks, and she had climbed up to see if she could discover what he had accomplished so far.

He found himself wishing the girl would talk. There was no sense in her sitting there as dumb as a fossil woman; not that he wanted to hear her chatter; there was, he told himself, such a thing as going to the extreme of silence. It did not at first occur to him that perhaps she was thinking the same kind of thoughts about his own taciturnity. For relief, he went down again to the fissure opening, got a choking cloud of dust full in his face, listened a moment to the whistle of the blast and retreated, picking his way carefully through utter darkness. The girl must have moved from her place on the rock, for he stumbled against her and nearly fell.

"This won't do," he muttered, and steadied her back to the wall. "If you'll stay where you are, I'll bring a light. No use trying to make it down off the ridge; the wind would whirl you off your feet like a bit of paper. Never saw a worse gale in this country."

"It's night, isn't it? Or is it the storm that makes it so dark?" Now that she had spoken he could hear the chattering of her teeth with the cold. Game, he

admitted grudgingly. He must do what he could to make her comfortable.

"It's both night and the storm that makes it dark," he replied, while he edged past her over the rocks. "You might come with me if you could see your way, but I think you'll do better with a light. Don't attempt to move until I come back, will you?"

"No — what would be the use?" she shivered.

Because he knew the way, he made fairly good time up the narrow crevice, and in the last covered tunnel he lighted a match to make sure of the proper turning. In the cavern it occurred to him that he need not bring the girl here at all. He could carry the chair into one of the inner passages before he went for her, and she need never know that this cavern existed; need never see his working paraphernalia or glimpse the maps and the artifacts. And once the storm was over he could move his workshop if it seemed necessary to take the precaution — and by that "if" he confessed a dawning surmise that he *might* be wrong; that she *might* be what she professed to be.

The cavern was cold, full of draughts, cheerless even when he had his largest carbide lamp going. For the sake of comfort if for no other reason he must find snugger quarters for the girl. He folded the chair and took it back with him, and a second lamp to give her a slight feeling of independence in her plight.

Her big eyes staring at him from out the dark when the white radiance of his lamp flowed over her struck a responsive note of sympathy in Abington's mind. After all, this mischance must be something of a tragedy to her, cooped up as she was with a strange man who had not shown any disposition to be friendly or even decently civil. She might even be hungry — certainly she was chilled through, from the look of her. That quivering of the chin seemed not to presage tears, for she shivered violently and pulled her sweater collar closer around her neck as she rose to follow him.

"Take this lamp and watch your step," he said matter-of-factly. "We'll have to burrow deep to get away from this icy wind, and there are one or two rough places where you must take your time. When did you last eat, by the way?"

"This morning, except a sandwich I had with me," she confessed dismally. "I'm afraid I shall have to ask you if I may borrow this lamp when the storm is over, so that I can find my way back to camp."

"Certainly," said Abington, and did not mention his conviction that it would take more than a lamp to find the tent after that storm.

Down a winding way he led her, rough-hewn with jagged rocks in the floor. He had in mind a certain small chamber that held some crude semblance to a room, with smooth walls and sandy floor; a place of

some special significance, apparently, for the walls were completely covered with carved hieroglyphics strongly suggesting the Aztec or the Egyptian or the old Babylonian or all three combined; a place where Abington spent a good deal of his spare time — if any of his waking hours might be called spare — conning the glyphs and feeling the thrill of achievement whenever he identified a new character or deciphered the meaning of an odd combination of old ones. He owned to a jealous distaste for bringing the girl here, but since it was the snuggest chamber he knew of in the higher part of the peak, he had not much choice in the matter.

Narrowly as he watched her while he unfolded the chair and with a gesture invited her to be seated, he saw no trace of satisfaction or even interest in the girl's eyes. Archæology and the things pertaining thereto seemed a closed book which she had never opened, much less read. She sat down wearily, still shivering a bit, and crossed her feet in their laced hiking boots, and looked at Abington as if now for the first time she was willing to concede the fact that he might be human. Looking at her Abington decided that perhaps he had misjudged her and her aunt. It was with a feeling of recklessness that he smiled down into her face, the corners of his eyelids wrinkling humorously.

"If you are as hungry as I am," he drawled,

"corned beef will be mighty acceptable. I know where there are several cans of it, and if you will wait here I'll bring a couple of cans."

"I can eat my share, thank you," she said almost with civility. "Will you see if that dust squall has blown over so I can get home?"

He said that he would, and made a fruitless trip part way down in the crevice. There was no need of going farther — from the shrieking of the wind he knew the storm was holding on with full force.

They dined rather gloomily on corned beef washed down with water from the canteen he brought, and settled themselves with what patience they could to wait for their release, and it would be difficult to decide which of them found the situation most irksome.

Jean sat relaxed in the striped chair, her hand in her sweater pocket where it could cuddle the handle of her little automatic and take comfort from the feel of its grim presence. Across the chamber, perhaps fifteen feet away, Abington sat on the floor with his knees drawn up and his arms folded across them, smoking and staring at a series of beautifully carved Aztec symbols on the wall opposite.

For a long while — considerably more than an hour it must have been — neither had spoken. Abington's thoughts were far in the past, dreamily reconstructing the lives of those who had chiseled deep the records which must have meant so much to those men of an-

cient times, but which carried so little meaning now to the casual eye. He had for the moment forgotten the girl who sat so quietly in the half light beyond the lamps which he had turned to send their full light upon the hieroglyphics; or if he thought of her at all it was with only a dim realization of her presence and the vague feeling that she had fallen asleep in her chair.

His cigarette burned down to the holder. He lifted it from between his lips, gave it an absent-minded glance and then came near letting it drop. From the chair where Jean Pattison sat in the slack posture of one who sleeps there came a low, mocking, infinitely sophisticated laugh; such a laugh as he had never dreamed could come from the lips of that slim, clean-cut, somewhat restrained girl who impressed him as stopping just short of the commonplace in her make-up.

"Oh, man of much wisdom, can you read the writing on the wall?" she said, and laughed again that mocking laugh. "And if you could read, of what avail? For those who wrote have gone and come again, have lived and died and lived so many times and learned with each living — perhaps even you, oh, man of wisdom, were one of those who scratched their puny memoirs on the rock! Can you not read your own writing, then? Must I read it for you?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"IF THAT'S YOUR GAME, I CAN PLAY IT"

SHEER amazement held Abington dumb for the moment. The girl was speaking, though when he turned the light upon her, as he did with an impulse born of the shock she gave him, he saw that her eyes were closed and her head was drooped forward as if in sleep. She was speaking, yes — but the voice was not her voice; not the voice he knew as hers.

"Perhaps the thing you seek lies buried deep in your own memory, man of wisdom," she went on. "Who can tell where lies the record of the past? Outside the wind is blowing the sand — and do you not know that for ages upon ages it has thus blown across the places where those ancient ones have walked? Can you hope to find their footprints still? Can their voices linger yet on the wind of to-day, who spoke a hundred centuries ago?

"Yet because you do not seek because of your greed, as some men do, I will tell you this, oh, man of wisdom: The thing you seek is here, and you will find it; but in the finding you risk much, and unless you love life well enough to fight for it, you will lose it, I think. There are those who wish you ill because of your seeking, but there are also those who hold no

great love for the bones that have turned to stone. These would tell you that because of the great evil which they did, their bones were not permitted to return to the dust of which they were made. Evil they were, and these do not return. But take care, oh, man of wisdom, that their evil does not prove your undoing. There is danger, and if you could read correctly what is written on the walls of these deep caves, you would better understand the risk you take.

"So were the warnings written on the tombs of the kings across the water, and the curse fell upon those who would despoil the tombs of the kings. But here — the ages have buried well the kings of this land, until greater wisdom than yours is needed to restore the record complete. Mountains have risen where then broad plains swept smoothly to the horizon. The plains have sunk beneath the sea, and again the seas have gone and left the land dry and barren. Rain and storm, sun and ice and great upheavals — you are indeed an intrepid seeker, to have the courage to go on in the face of all these elements which have helped obliterate the footprints of the ancient ones. But there is much that you will find in spite of the obstacles, so take heart, oh, man of wisdom!"

She laughed that half-mocking, half-tender, wholly enigmatic little rippling laugh, and was silent for a moment. Abington was still staring at her when she spoke again.

"One who bears no good will toward those whose bones have turned to stone would speak to you, man of wisdom; a huge, simple-hearted man who wishes you well. And if the language he uses is crude and primitive, it is because he has followed the line of least resistance when he learned to speak your tongue, which is so strange to us who lived long ago. So listen now to one who calls himself Many Feathers, though that is not his name nor anything like it. You will call him Indian. Well, he is that and very much more. Farewell, man of wisdom. When you find that which you are seeking, send a thought to one who was a princess long ago in that land they call Egypt, and remember that she told you to fight hard for your life if you would save it. Farewell."

Abington did not answer. He remained there by the wall, leaning now toward the girl, his weight falling upon one arm while he watched her. He saw her shudder, heard her give a long sigh and shiver again as she lifted her face toward him, squaring her shoulders and pulling herself erect in the chair so that she sat very straight with her chest thrown out. Seen so, she looked larger, stronger, more dominating. Her voice rose full and rich, with a sonorous quality that echoed from the rock walls of the chamber:

"I am Many Feathers. Long ago me liveum here. My people happy. Then much water where now land, much land where now water. White men come.

Killum Indian, killum squaw, catchum Indian, makeum work. Whipum all time so sometime Indian die from hurt. Sometime tear out Indian heart, eatum so be strong like Indian. Indian all time hateum white man. No can trust. Very bad. Very fierce. I think you callum Aztec, I dunno. Scratchum on rock.

"Many Feathers big chief. Make big fight those white man. Fight long time, many Indian be kill. Many Indian white man ketchum. Makeum Indian work hard. Starveum, whipum, workum all time. Many Feathers workum this place — what you callum slave. Dig, dig, all time dig many wigwam for white chief, white medicine man go hide for foolum people. White man god like killum on rock, tearum heart. White man god all same sun. Very bad.

"Killum Indian for god, throwum down deep hole — much water. You know. You find um, fall in water. That place much bad spirit. You findum bone in that place, you leaveum. Them Indian bone, you no must takeum. Letum rest. Many Feathers speak you no takeum Indian bone.

"You go look one place, you findum white man bone, putum away safe place. Indian god heap mad, makeum white man bone hard like stone. White man have hard heart, by an' by white man die, bone hard all same heart. Many Feathers talkum straight. You findum hard bone, you findum much gold, much —

sil-ver, much — cop-per, much blue stone like sky. You takeum, you keepum. Many Feathers say you keepum. You findum hard bone, findum all them thing, you take care white man stone no killum. White man fixum so stone killum. You take care."

As suddenly as it began the resonant, bold voice ceased speaking. Gradually the girl relaxed, seemed to shrink before Abington's startled eyes. A shuddery sigh like the slumbrous breath of a child who has cried itself to sleep, and she slumped down in the chair as she had been at first; asleep, any observer would have sworn.

But Abington was not so sure of the genuineness of that childlike repose after so extraordinary a performance. All his old suspicions returned fourfold to set him on his guard. Of course he understood that he was supposed to believe that he had just been favored with a supernatural exhibition of mediumship, but he had seen and heard what purported to be spirit manifestations before now, and he had never considered them of much consequence. Usually a discerning mind had little trouble in seeing the wheels go round, and in any case so-called spirit messages always struck him as being hopelessly puerile and unimportant.

Lips sardonically twisted beneath his beard, Abington himself relaxed against the wall and pretended to be asleep while he watched the girl through half-closed

eyes. He was in the mood to trap her by seeming acquiescent. Perhaps he would do a little trance work himself if the opportunity offered! And then he thought what a fool she must think him to attempt so paltry a trick, and his anger burned for bitter speech. Never again would he believe her sincere in anything she said or did, he told himself decisively. But he would pretend that he had been impressed, and so he would lead her on into further entanglements where she must betray herself.

"Young lady," he told her soundlessly while he watched, "I'll match you spirit for spirit when you quit playing 'possum. If that's your game, I can play it too."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"BE YOURSELF, MR. ABINGTON!"

FOR more than three hours Jean slept in the chair and John Abington watched her cynically. The result of that long scrutiny was slightly perturbing, wholly unsatisfactory and definitely disappointing, whether he looked at it as a man or as a scientist. For one thing, he could not deny that the girl was honestly asleep all the while; with the light shining upon her face he would have seen the least flicker of an eyelash, would have detected any conscious regulation of her breath. She slept — there was no doubt of that. The fact opened before him a long line of conjecture.

Since she really was asleep, what was the truth about her amazing monologue? Was it possible that he had witnessed a genuine case of mediumship, involuntary, perhaps, so far as she was concerned, but all the more authentic because of that circumstance? Abington did not believe it. Had she merely talked in her sleep? That, he decided, was more improbable still. Her speech had been too clear, too coherent for that; her characterization altogether too plausible. The change from the bantering, smooth-flowing utterances of the self-styled "Egyptian princess" to the

chopped phrases of "Many Feathers" was too abrupt, too finished to be the aimless mumblings of a sleep-clogged consciousness.

What, then, was the explanation of the incident? Abington did not know.

Being frankly puzzled, he naturally spent much time in studying her pale, passive face. Sunburned below the shelter of her wide-brimmed hat, her temples and brow were white; too white for perfect health, it seemed to him. Her mouth was well shaped — well he knew how sharp the tongue within it could be! — the chin firm enough, her throat round and slim. With her body slackened in deep slumber, he saw that she was a well-made young person, with trim ankles, small feet and hands; not displeasing in any way, he decided with a slight smile for the clear waste of an adventure such as this, which might be expected to ripen into romance, on a level-headed, unemotional scientist like himself. If she were a hundred thousand years old, now ——

"Fossilize her bones and I'd go wild over her," he admitted finally. "Alive and able to interfere in my work — hm-mm — not so priceless a discovery — not by a long shot! Damned nuisance, unless I can get her out of here before she finds out anything worth telling. Wonder how the weather looks by now?"

Since the lamps were burning dimly he added more water to the little tanks, watched the rejuvenation of

the white flame tongues and left the larger lamp for the girl while he went down the crevice. When he returned she was awake, huddled in her chair which she had placed close against the wall facing the passage. She looked frightened, Abington thought.

"Nothing doing yet on the ridge," he announced in a casual tone, as if it did not greatly matter. "There seems to be a sleety rain with the wind, which is still blowing a hurricane. Did you sleep well, Miss ——"

"My name is Jean Pattison," she said ungraciously. "I don't think I slept at all — or at least not more than a few minutes. Must I spend the night in this horrible place?"

"What's left of the night, I'm afraid, Miss Pattison. Do you always talk in your sleep?"

She gave him a cold glance of inquiry. Plainly enough her look said that she was not to be baited in that silly fashion.

Abington got his pipe out and filled it with tobacco from a leather pouch, knowing how she watched his methodical finger movements.

"Pardon me, but do you smoke?" His black eyes dwelt upon her speculatively. "If you do, I have cigarettes."

"Thank you, no!"

"So many women smoke nowadays, it's growing quite an ordinary habit."

She let the subject rest there.

"You did talk in your sleep, you know."

"How perfectly absurd!" she retorted. "I never have been known to do such a thing, and I was not asleep five minutes. I doubt that I even dozed."

Abington lifted an eyebrow in polite contradiction while he got his pipe going. After all, why argue with her? If those speeches had been a clever bit of acting she must certainly know that she made them: if she was honestly ignorant of what had happened, there was nothing to be gained by pressing the point, since to convince her he must frighten her — and as the "princess" had flung at him, of what avail? He looked at his watch. It was nearing midnight, though it seemed as though it must be morning.

"If you would rather have this cave to yourself, Miss Pattison," he began again, in what he considered a pleasantly considerate tone, "there are two or three others that I know of. I can leave the lamp with you and go hunt another hole to crawl into. If the lamp goes dim it will be because the water is out of the tank. Do you understand carbide lamps, Miss Pattison?"

"I never saw one before, Mr. ——"

"Abington."

"Mr. Abington, I think I'd go crazy if I were left here in the dark alone. I — I wish you'd stay. If the lamp should go out ——"

"I was going to explain that in a couple of hours (you wear a wrist watch, I see) it would be wise to open that little cap in the top of the lamp and pour in more water; half a cup or less of water will keep it running a long time. The gas is formed by letting water drip down through a valve over the lumps of carbide below. Miners find them very useful where a mine is not lighted with electricity."

"This is your mine, I suppose." With the threat of being left alone she was doing her best now to be civil.

"Yes," said Abington drily, "this is my mine."

"Aunt Betsy knew that carnotite was somewhere near Sawtooth, but I don't think she guessed it would be right up in the top of the mountain. Since you've already found it and are working it, I don't suppose there's any use of Aunt Betsy looking further; though she thought that even if you had located a claim, as she calls it, you might not have grabbed it all, and she could stake out one on the — the leader, or whatever it is. I do hope she found some place to take shelter. I'm half crazy, thinking about her."

"She must have seen it coming," Abington said preoccupiedly. "I should have taken warning if I had not been inside, here. You probably saw it coming up across the valley, yourself."

She uncrossed her feet with a nervous gesture, and crossed them the other way.

"I know you think I'm — well, *dumb,* to stay on the ridge until the storm caught me. But Aunt Betsy has raved so about the strange lights and shadows and how they keep changing and taking new forms and making the oddest effects — well, I did see that red wall rolling up the valley, and I was watching it. I thought it was one of those peculiar light effects. Then you came crashing down at me, and I thought it was some animal."

"I must apologize, I think. I had reason to believe I might have some trouble in keeping my work from being generally known, and I suspected that you and your aunt had been sent out to — well, spy on my work, if you will forgive so harsh a word."

Her first antagonism flashed again in her eyes.

"Why should we? We couldn't jump your claim, if you had beaten Aunt Betsy to the carnotite. You have Strombergs behind you and Aunt Betsy is working alone. Of course, I suppose you think it's perfectly honorable to rush in here and grab a fortune away from a woman who has spent several hundred dollars already looking for it, but it seems a pretty cheap trick to me, if you'll pardon my saying so in plain English. Strombergs have more money and more mines than they know what to do with. Aunt Betsy hasn't, and that's putting it mildly. But you needn't think I'm making a sob talk, for I'm not. Aunt Betsy would do her level best and then some to beat you

to it, but you were ahead of her and had several extra days, and you're a man and a mining engineer and have some one to help you. That Bill you have working for you must have lied to Aunt Betsy. He said you were *looking* for carnotite — he never hinted that you'd already found it!

"If Aunt Betsy had known you're already working the mine she wouldn't have started out at daylight prospecting for it, and she wouldn't have been caught out in this awful storm. If anything happens to Aunt Betsy I shall always feel that you're to blame, Mr. Abington!"

"Are you sure your Aunt Betsy would know carnotite when she saw it? A good many prospectors are fooled on it."

"Well, she ought to — she's been in the mining game ever since she was my age," Jean replied with naïve finality. "It's yellow, isn't it? She has a sample she showed me, and that was yellow as a lemon."

Abington grinned, without the supercilious quality which she had so disliked in his smiles.

"That's what it has proved to be to a good many poor devils of miners; a lemon. I hope your aunt is lucky enough to find the real thing, Miss Pattison. I'm going to own myself a liar and be done with it. I'm not after carnotite at all, and neither am I working for the Strombergs. I begin to see that we have

been at cross-purposes all along, and I beg your pardon for my own stupidity. So, since you are really interested in archæology yourself, tell me what you think of these hieroglyphics on the wall."

Jean stared at him, looked at the wall where he pointed, turned a puzzled look again to his face.

"But I'm not!" she exclaimed. "I don't know anything at all about it, and I'm not sure that I want to know. Archæologists are all atheists, aren't they? They believe that man evoluted from monkeys and all that idiotic stuff. You—" she hesitated as if she feared to offend "—you aren't an archæologist, for heaven's sake?"

"Bill calls me an Adam chaser," he told her with a whimsical laugh. "I believe God made man, just as he made the trees and elephants and—monkeys. No, I'm not an atheist, though I am an archæologist. Those carvings, for instance, there in front of you. What would you say if I told you they were put there anywhere from ten thousand to a hundred—yes, five hundred thousand years ago, by the first race of white men that lived on this earth?" He was deliberately challenging her pretence if there was any; he meant to discover once and for all how honest was this carnotite prospecting she talked about.

Jean gasped.

"I'd say you're goofy," she told him, forgetting dignity. "Why, the world isn't nearly that old, and

besides, the first man was Adam, and he lived in the Garden of Eden until he sinned. That is on the other side of the world, and America wasn't discovered."

"Are you sure of that, Miss Pattison?"

"Why, of course I'm sure! The Bible says so, and I believe the Bible, I hope!"

"Then what were you talking about, a while ago, when you first fell asleep? How did you know so much about those ancient men who worshipped the sun and made human sacrifices on this very mountain — or in it, rather — and carved their records on these walls?" Abington's eyes never left her. He would have the truth, he told himself, before he was through. She must trap herself if she were playing innocent. He would catch the false note somewhere.

"Talking — in my sleep? You said that before, but I know it wasn't true, because I wasn't asleep. Be yourself, Mr. Abington!" She laughed uneasily, apologizing with her eyes for the slang.

"Be *your*self, Miss Pattison! Is it possible that you are going to deny the princess, or Many Feathers?"

"And who may they be, Mr. Abington?"

Abington eyed her meditatively before he answered, and the longer he hesitated, the less certain he was of what he wished to say. She was looking at him curiously, even with a trace of fear as if the thought had come to her that she was shut into a mountain with

a man not quite sane. It was that look which finally decided him. After all, this was neither the time nor the place for bullying the girl, were she thrice a pretender. In common decency he lied.

"They're part of a strange dream I had. You were mixed up in it, and it had to do with these ancient rock carvers I am tracing. You and a princess and an Indian chief ——"

"Why, how funny!" She laughed, crinkling her eyes and pushing her bobbed hair back from her forehead with a careless gesture which made her seem as light of fancy as a schoolgirl. "I wondered what you meant when you kept saying I talked in my sleep. It must have been a dream, Mr. Abington, for I haven't been asleep, and I never saw an Indian chief in my life, except on the screen, of course; nor a princess, either."

Her eyes strayed to the carvings and she studied them more closely, wondering perhaps what there was about them to be worth studying. And gradually her face clouded. She frowned, gave a little shiver and glanced nervously toward the passage which opened black before her.

"They're devilish!" she said fiercely, speaking under her breath. "Every now and then I have a feeling that some one is creeping up in the dark; or standing right behind me. I felt it when I first came into the valley, and I've been feeling it in here. Not all

the while — it just comes over me at odd moments. Mr. Abington, you don't *really* believe white people lived here a hundred thousand years ago?" She shivered again, pulling her sweater up at the neck. "It gives me the creeps to think of it," she said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

A TRUCE

ABINGTON liked an audience, perhaps because he had once been professor of archæology in a certain well-known college, and had likewise been called upon to deliver occasional lectures on other subjects dear to his heart. He had left the college for the field, but the training had let Bill in for many an impromptu lecture on ancient civilizations in America. Now, he found himself imprisoned for the time being with a girl who seemed intelligent and sufficiently interested to listen to him. The setting was ideal for the subject and his suspicion of the two women was completely reversed by her frank explanation of their presence in the valley. There was her strange talk — whether she talked in her sleep or in a trance, it surely was extraordinary — and yet she professed to believe that archæologists were all atheists. Well, perhaps he could teach her differently.

So Abington began with the world a gaseous mass whirling through space and led Jean's imagination giddily down through eons of forgotten time until he landed her breathless upon the primal island, called Cascadia, of which Nevada is a portion. Strange, lumbering animals he showed her there, and told her

how and why their hugeness shrank with changing conditions and food until they emerged into some semblance of the birds and animals we know to-day. He was going beautifully when she stopped him.

"How do you know all this?" she demanded. "The Bible doesn't say anything about such creatures, and I'm sure ——"

"Neither would I, perhaps, if I had to tell the whole story of creation in a thousand words or less," Abington retorted. "I have found the fossil remains of these animals, embedded in the old sedimentary rock. Ask your Aunt Betsy if that isn't proof enough for any scientist.

"And I have found certain evidence which goes to show that man also originated in Cascadia. For one thing, I have found what is, so far as science knows, the oldest megalithic tombs on earth. And if you don't know what that means, I'll explain that a megalithic tomb is one built of huge blocks of stone. In this discovery of mine the megaliths are great boulders brought from a distance and built up into a hill of tombs. Each tomb was sealed with boulders so keyed together that when the tomb was opened tons of rock would roll down and crush the desecrator to death."

"And you were crushed to death in the interests of science?" she mocked. "How perfectly terrible!"

"All right, laugh! I was not crushed to death, as

it happened. There have been earthquakes enough since the tombs were built to shake a few of the man-traps out of plumb. A few I opened. The rest are undisturbed. Carvings — much cruder than these which you see here — are still to be seen on the boulders near by. They indicate an age staggering to the imagination, just as the tombs ——"

"Well, I've visited the cliff dwellings and I've seen some of the ancient Maya ruins in Mexico. They're terribly old, but they aren't as old as Egypt, for instance. Any book will tell you that. I still believe, Mr. Abington, that God created the first man and the first woman and placed them in the Garden of Eden. I don't believe we grew like animals and splashed around in the slime with the rest of the bugs. Those tombs are interesting, I admit. Probably the Mayas wandered up this far sometime, don't you think?"

"I know they did," Abington laughed. "You're a bright pupil, Miss Pattison. I managed to decipher a record on the rocks at the Hill of a Thousand Tombs which says, in effect, that three hundred of the wisest and best (This is a free translation) returned to the land of their fathers. How old those carvings are I am not prepared to say at this time, but certainly they are preglacial."

"They estimate the age of tombs," said Jean readily, "by the pottery and ornaments found with the bones."

Abington hid an amused grin behind his beard.

"True enough, they do! But what are you going to do, Miss Pattison, when the tombs were built before pottery was invented? Or before ornaments were made and worn? What if there aren't any bones, even?"

Jean gave him a long, suspicious look.

"Oh, well, why didn't you say you were trying to make a fool of me? I suppose it was interesting to find a rock pile that looked like tombs, but graves usually contain bones — ugh! And I must say it isn't the most agreeable subject in the world, especially for this place." The shudder she gave was more than half involuntary.

"I beg your pardon. The subject shouldn't be particularly grewsome after so many centuries have passed. I merely wanted to give you some understanding of why I consider my work bigger even than a carnotite mine, and I wanted to remove the mystery from these carvings which seem so weird to you. To me they are strange old records of a forgotten race, which I am trying to follow back to the beginning. I wasn't trying to fool you, Miss Pattison. I did find tombs so old that the bones had gone back to dust. I know they were bones laid carefully away in the rock tombs, because I had the dust analyzed by the foremost chemists on the coast and I am relying upon their report. The dust of bones lies in those ancient

tombs carved with rudimentary hieroglyphics from which, I am firmly convinced, grew the ancient Maya symbols.

"Now here—" he paused and gave her a sharp look which held his last doubt of her sincerity and her harmlessness to his work "—here are writings which I believe are older than the most ancient writings of Egypt. As a matter of fact, I believe that here on these walls may be seen the origin of written language—and that means the written language of the whole world."

She stared at him uncomprehendingly, amazed beyond the power to dispute the possibility.

"To decipher them all would be a stupendous task. In all the world there is no key to these writings and it is therefore necessary to trace the ancient hieroglyphics back to their most primitive form and compare those with the symbols found here. For instance, the Maya snake chronology may be found in various modified forms in all ancient writings. The snake signifies wisdom and power. In the ancient Maya writings, we find the coiled snake. Here you see the snake carved in cruder lines—I believe it a pre-Maya snake. Up here—" he rose and pointed to a carving high over his head "—you see the circle crossed, meaning the four seasons of the moon; moon phases, that is. The pre-modified Manchurian writings show that symbol exactly, and so do the Egyptian and the

ancient Babylonian. You will find that symbol repeated over and over in these caves, combined with other symbols relating to the religious rites of the people who lived here."

"They must have had ladders," sighed Jean, "to carve so near the ceiling. There aren't many down low where you'd expect to see the most."

"They were a big people, I believe. I'm afraid to say how large I think they were, Miss Pattison, or you'd call me crazy. But Bill assures me he has found fossilized men in here that are eight feet high."

"That sounds quite like Bill," Jean commented drily. "He is fond of assuring people of impossible things, I imagine." She yawned behind one hand and looked at her watch. "Don't you suppose the storm is over now?" she asked.

Abington studied her for a moment before he answered. As plainly as words could have done, she had indicated that archæology did not interest her particularly and he was keen enough to feel her boredom and to take the hint. Or was she bored? He wondered if she were not merely shying away from a subject that to her was grewsome in these surroundings.

"You win, Miss Pattison," he laughed. "You must have fancied you were back in school. I apologize, and I'll promise not to preach my ancient civilization to you again." As an afterthought he added,

"The storm may be over, though I doubt it. At any rate, we can't attempt that ridge before daylight."

"It seems a week since we came in here," she sighed. "Your talk didn't bore me, Mr. Abington, but it's so far from anything I have ever heard or read that I must admit it sounds very much like Arabian Nights or some other fairy tale. Besides, it seems to contradict the Bible story of creation, and I can't quite adjust myself to your point of view. I admit that this cave is interesting — weird is the word I want to use, of course. It does give me the creeps, just to think of people living in here so long ago."

"I'm sorry it affects you that way. I could show you a wonderful series of tunnels and caves, and some eolithic implements which seem to prove the size of these people. But of course if the subject is disagreeable to you we'll talk of other things."

Jean looked at him with clouded eyes, glanced again at the carvings and shook her head in puzzlement.

"I don't know — it seems to come to me in waves; or in moods that pass as suddenly as they possess me," she said. "While you were telling me about it, the subject fascinated me; as if it was something I had been wanting to know. And then all at once I felt a dread of it all and didn't want to hear another word. I seem to be full of whims to-night, Mr. Abington. I think it must be a case of nerves."

"Then the best cure for that is distraction," he

declared, getting up and reaching for the lamp. "A tour of the caves might do you good, Miss Pattison. I haven't made a complete exploration. For instance, I know of only one way open between the base of this peak and the top, and that way is not exactly a thoroughfare." He grinned at the memory of a very disagreeable season spent in that place which was no thoroughfare nor anything like it. "If I could find the way down to the lower system of caves we could go out that way, of course, and reach camp in spite of the storm."

She was on her feet instantly, all eagerness and with her dread of the place forgotten in the thought of leaving it.

"Let's look for a way, Mr. Abington! Even that way you speak of — we *could* get down that way, couldn't we?"

"By way of the Pool of Evil Death? No, I couldn't advise it, Miss Pattison. Getting down would be the easiest thing in the world to do, but getting out is a different matter entirely. The first time I came into these caves I neglected to bring a canteen with me, and for want of water my lamp went out. I was lost for some time, and it was then I found the pool and made my way up to this series of caves. It was an experience, Miss Pattison, which I should not care to repeat.

"Since then, I have made a survey of this upper

system of caves and a portion of the lower ones, but it is not completed and to date I have failed to discover any way leading up from the lower caves to these. There may be some such connection. There should be, and when I have completed mapping the inside of this mountain, I shall probably have discovered the stairway leading from the first to the tenth story, as it were."

She was following close at his heels, evidently afraid of the shadows behind her and her lamp, and now where the passage widened she came up alongside, walking close and shivering a little. Abington paused to show her where he had chalked the number of the passage and its direction on the rock just within the portal, flashing his lamplight over the walls to give her a general idea of their height.

"Every opening which I have thoroughly explored and surveyed is scribed, as surveyors call it. I'm telling you this just in case we become separated. Never go into one unless you see the chalk mark, and be sure you remember what it says. Better still, never go into one unless I am with you."

"You needn't worry, Mr. Abington. I have no desire to explore. All I want is to get out of here and find my aunt."

"It will be simple," said Abington persuasively, "to take a look at the weather through a natural window in the cave I should like to show you. There is plenty

of time, for I assure you I have no intention of allowing you to attempt that razor-back ridge before daylight. Even if the storm has blown over the trail will be slippery and unsafe. So if you are not too tired, perhaps you would be interested in the cavern which was used as a temple in the sun-worship of the people I am tracing."

Jean gave an acquiescent little smile, though she made no pretence of being enthusiastic over anything he could show her. It would serve to fill in the time, and she still hoped that there would be some way of getting down the mountain; whether inside it or outside, she did not greatly care. When she spoke of it again, however, Abington shook his head.

"As I told you before, I know of no underground route to the valley level. I sincerely wish that I did know, but since I do not we must make the best of it. Now here, Miss Pattison, is where I have my office. Also, here is more of the corned beef if you would like to banquet off it again. You don't smoke so the tobacco which was left here is of no use to you, of course."

There was little in that cave to hold her interest, and the wind whistled in through the upper crannies, evidence that the storm still held. But when she stared up at the bleak openings Abington merely chuckled.

"Those are not the windows I had in mind when

I suggested looking out. We'll go on to another chamber where I can show you some very interesting stone hammers and wedges which were used in digging out these passages and enlarging some of the caves. I'm taking you by a somewhat roundabout course because the more direct way is steep and rough. Look at the height of this passage. Can you imagine a small-sized race of men hacking out these tunnels with crude stone hammers and picks, Miss Pattison? You can see for yourself that this passage was made by man. See how jagged the ceiling is. Literally hacked out, with tools which I shall show you presently."

"If we don't get lost," Jean said uneasily, when they came to a three-way fork in the tunnel.

"No danger of that, Miss Pattison. See those chalk marks? These upper passages are all mapped. Bill and I have gone over every foot of them with transit and tape. Now here is a large cavern where many artifacts (tools and cooking stones) were left. Also there were seeds buried here, and sandals made of woven bark almost entirely disintegrated by time. A mighty interesting place which I shall show you in more detail some day when the sun is shining and a little light seeps into this gloomy grot." His lazy chuckle brought a smile, though worry still clouded her eyes.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

HOW DID JEAN PATTISON KNOW?

It was in the cave which Abington called the temple chamber where Jean's mood changed from a passive acquiescence to a tense, eager interest that nevertheless gave Abington an indefinable feeling of discomfort. Without a word to him she walked straight across the huge cavern, shaped like an inverted bowl of irregular shape as if it had been bent askew in the potter's hands. The altar rock stood near the western side, and behind it was the black opening of the passage, which went straight to the outer wall of the peak where a few narrow slits gave a view of the outer world and the ridge which held the trail; from there the passage took a sharp turn and sloped slightly downward to the ledge from which a straight drop of unmeasured depth would plunge one into the very center of the Pool of Evil Death. Not that the death itself would be so evil — merely death by drowning; but the walls of the passage were lined with the carved "chain of evil" symbols which gave the pool its unpleasant name. It was this pool which Jean had mentioned in the voice purporting to be that of Many Feathers, and Abington began to watch the girl with

furtive interest, wondering if it were possible that the place held some occult significance to which her subconscious mind reacted without her knowledge.

It would seem so, for in spite of the fact that she carried the lamp carelessly tilted downward so that it lighted a small radius around her feet and left the walls in deep shadow, she went straight to the altar hollowed for human sacrifice. Abington had meant to guide her around that particular spot with its grewsome history, and now he dropped a pace or two behind, curious to see what she would do.

Just before the altar she halted, then lifted both arms and held them palm upward, her eyes closed and a rapt, still look upon her face. With an inward tremor Abington saw that she was facing directly toward the east — after many turnings and in those dark corridors which would have made it impossible for even Abington to orientate himself without previous knowledge of the place. How did Jean Pattison know? Abington stood stock still and watched her, scarce daring to think just what it might mean.

"The sun god is angry with his people," Jean began in a level monotone which gave the effect of a chant delivered as the Indians speak, dropping the voice to a distinct pause between terse sentences. "The sun god is burning the earth with his anger. He burns the grass. He drinks the water of the rivers. All the earth is burnt with his anger. The rain god is angry.

He will not give water to the earth. All the people of the earth must die with the anger of the gods.

"Now the sun god comes again. He will look upon his people with his burning eyes. When he looks upon this place he will see his people weeping. He will see that our hearts are good. We give him a good heart when he comes again. It is the heart of a maiden, pure and good, that we give to our father the sun. We will give the body to feed the darkness. Then the sun god will love his people. He will not burn the earth, he will not drink the water of the rivers.

"Now the daughter of our high priest will go to kneel at the feet of the sun god and will ask the evil one to have mercy. She will give herself for her people. The sun god does not like the heart of a slave. The daughter of the high priest will go. The sun god will hear her. The god of darkness will be kind. The rain god will give water to the earth."

She stood there silent, face and hands uplifted to the slit-like opening in the eastern wall of the cave. Boots and knickers and gray shirt and sweater she wore, but Abington's mind clothed her in the garb of an ancient priestess of the sun and so found nothing absurd in her appearance. Indeed, she held him spell-bound some feet away while she stood there silent, waiting. It might be a hoax, but Abington could not have moved or spoken if he had wanted to.

Of a sudden she spoke again, slowly and using words strange and meaningless to Abington, though he gathered that she was invoking the sun as it rose and shed a beam upon the altar. She turned abruptly away to the passage behind her and walked into the darkness.

Why Abington let her go like that he never could satisfactorily explain to himself afterward. The whole scene had been so unexpected, so amazingly vivid a performance, that he stood like an onlooker at a play which held him enthralled. Not until she had gone did he think of the danger she might be in, and start after her with the lamp. Her own light had dropped to the cave floor and gone out, so that she walked in complete darkness — and that passage led to the Pool of Evil Death.

Abington ran, holding the lamp high to throw its light far ahead. He hoped rather wildly that the wind blowing in through the slits at the turning would bring her back to herself, but when he reached the corner she had gone on. He heard her footsteps on the echoing rock floor, he saw a vague outline of her figure moving steadily before him down the slope to the end.

The heart of John Abington came up in his throat as he sprang forward.

"Miss Pattison! Jean! Come back! For God's sake, that's the drop-off to the pool!"

He ran — and so he saw her when she fell. Or

did she dive from the edge of the rock platform? He could have sworn that Jean Pattison placed her finger tips together and made a beautiful swan dive off that rock. But that may have been because she walked with her hands held high over her head.

Abington brought up on the brink of the abyss, barely saving himself from going down as Jean had gone. With a hollow reverberation from the domelike roof her splashing into the water came echoing up to him and turned him sick with horror. Well he knew that Pool of Evil Death, with its sly undercurrent tugging to some subterranean outlet and the drip, drip, drip from the rocks above tinkling into the pool.

How deep was the drop he did not know. It had seemed miles when he climbed the wall to get out, but he realized that he had been pretty well exhausted and must have made slow headway. Certainly it was deep enough! If she were not stunned by the fall —— His heart turned over as the faint hope came to him.

"Jean!" he called. "Jean Pattison!"

"Yes?"

Abington's knees buckled under him at the sound of her voice, clear and normal once more, thank the Lord! Not too full of terror, either, he noticed.

"Get to the bank and wait — I'm coming down!"

"I'm already on the bank, Mr. Abington! Is this the way down — the way you said was no thoroughfare?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

IN THE POOL OF EVIL DEATH

WHAT reply he made, or whether he made any reply at all, Abington could not have told five minutes afterward. He was running back up the passage, beams of light dancing before him as he went. In his workshop was a knotted rope for use in exploring the steeper tunnels, and he would need it now if he were to get the girl out of the pool. Even with the rope it would not be so simple, unless she were more athletic than she looked to be. There was a matter of twelve or fifteen feet of sheer wall to scale, he remembered, to reach the narrow water channel down which he had walked in the dark to fall headlong into the pool as the girl had done.

"Got to be done," he muttered, while he ran through the caves to his workshop. "Pretty mess she got herself into with her mummery! Lucky I know that pool from experience — bad enough at that." And a little later he added with a savage note of resentment for the scare she had given him, "Serve her right to sit there in the dark for a while!"

For all that he hurried. Since the lower system of caves was not so well supplied with water that he cared to take any risk — it was the lack of water for

his lamp that had plunged him in darkness into the pool — he added a small canteen to his equipment, and more carbide in a pocket can. Probably no more than five minutes elapsed before he was back at the lip of the abyss, yet his voice was anxious in spite of his effort to control it when he called down to the girl.

"Hello!" she called back with surprising cheerfulness, while the walls echoed the word again and again. "Are you coming down too? Bring a light, will you please? I lost mine somewhere."

"How high a dive is it, Miss Pattison?" he asked, secretly dreading the plunge.

"I really don't know," she told him. "But I can hear you plainly, and the landing wasn't painful at all — perhaps it's forty or fifty feet. Why? You aren't afraid, are you, Mr. Abington?"

He had no answer for that jibe, but he caught himself wishing she might have a taste of his experience in getting out of that hole. It was all well enough for her to take her predicament lightly; she probably had not been conscious of that awful step-off she had taken, and moreover she knew that he was right there to help her out. She could even see the twinkling of his lamp, he supposed.

Abington shut off his light, thrust the lamp into his coat pocket and jumped, feet first and with his hands touching over his head. He wasn't going to take a chance of spattering his brains over a rock, he told

himself grimly, and splashed into the pool with astonishing speed. His feet struck bottom, he shot to the surface and struck out for the edge, reaching it in three strong strokes. Not so bad after all.

As he pulled himself out upon the rock ledge and fumbled for the lamp in his pocket the girl spoke in the darkness to his left.

"What in the world happened, Mr. Abington? Why didn't you tell me there was a trap door in that cave? Luckily I can swim pretty well or I might have drowned. I must say I've seen better and safer guides than you!"

Abington was fussing with the lamp and he made that an excuse for waiting to count ten before he answered. The swift thought came to him that the less said about her manner of reaching the pool the better.

"There's a way of getting from here to the ground floor," he evaded. "Unfortunately, the only way of getting to the pool from above is by taking a high dive. I hope you'll forgive me for not explaining the matter in full, Miss Pattison."

"Oh, since I'm still at your mercy, I suppose I must forgive you for the time being. But it was something of a shock, let me tell you, to suddenly find myself in the water. But at that I feel much more comfortable than I did up in those spooky caves. They gave me the creeps, I tell you."

"You'll experience more creeps, as you call it, before you are out of here," he retorted. "It's pretty rough going from here down. But I think we can make it all right."

"You *think* we can? For heaven's sake, aren't you sure?"

"Fairly. A lot depends on you, Miss Pattison. Now, here is the first stunt required of you, and the whole thing rests upon your doing it." With the lamp going again, he got up and walked around to where she stood waiting, a soggy, slim little figure which somehow appealed to a certain tender streak in his nature which John Abington would have sworn he did not possess.

"Come over here and I'll show you the opening we must get into. See up there? You'll have to climb on my shoulders — perhaps stand on my head if you aren't tall enough to reach — and scramble into that hole. It's the end of a watercourse and will take us into other tunnels and natural passages which I know fairly well; and so down and down, into a cave which opens into a canyon. Think you can make it?"

While she stared up at the black opening above their heads, he studied her face as the lamplight revealed it dimly. The cloud in her eyes was gone, he observed, and with it had disappeared her nervous dread. It was odd, but her plunge down into the Pool of Evil Death seemed to have cleared her mental atmosphere,

and he was conscious of a distinct feeling of relief. He wanted no further psychic experiences with her; certainly not until they were safely out of the mountain. He liked her better when she was her normal self, as she was now.

"I don't know — how am I going to shinny up over the edge when I do reach it?" she demanded doubtfully. "Are you sure there is no other way out of here, Mr. Abington?"

"Fairly sure. As to how you'll do it, I must leave that to you, I'm afraid. But I seriously advise you to do it somehow! When you get up there I'll throw this rope up and let you catch it and fasten it somewhere so that I can climb up." Then he chuckled. "If you're harboring any grudge against me, Miss Pattison, that will be an ideal time to have your revenge. Just don't fasten the rope to anything, and I'll probably remain down here for some time!"

She laughed at first, but presently she sobered as the full purport of the suggestion reached her.

"And I'm to crawl into that hole somehow, or we both stay here!" she said. "I can see why you didn't like to explain in detail before you dropped me down the trap door, Mr. Abington!" Then, as she saw the look in his eyes, "Well, I never was much of an acrobat, but this is a good time to begin. How do I get started?"

For answer Abington stooped to one knee and held

out his hand. He thought he saw a blush on her cheeks, but he was not certain of that. At any rate she stepped gingerly upon his knee, steadied herself with his hand, stepped upon his shoulder with one foot, hesitated while she braced herself against the wall, gave an audible gasp and lifted the other foot.

"I know my boots will dig in terribly," she stammered faintly when she was up.

"Nonsense. There isn't enough weight on them," he denied. "Now, Miss Pattison, just hold yourself steady and don't be afraid, and I'll get up and we'll see how close you are to the opening."

A ticklish two minutes followed. Abington was harassed by the fear that Jean would topple and fall and he would not be able to catch her. Jean gave a little squeal or two, but "gym" training received at school held good in this emergency and she did not fall.

"It's a solid mountain, Mr. Abington. I tried to push it over, and it never moved!" she giggled nervously when the feat was accomplished. "But heavens, how am I ever going to get down without breaking my neck?"

"You're going to get up, not down," he retorted. "Well, can you make it?"

She waited a minute, groping in the darkness of the wall which loomed above the zone of light.

"I can just hook my fingers over the edge," she

said finally. "But it's smooth — I can't get a grip on anything."

"Stand on my head, then," Abington commanded instantly.

"I'll be standing on my own head if I fall," she came back at him. Nevertheless he felt one foot slowly leave his shoulder and move up to his head. She was raking his ear gropingly with her heel when he reached up and took her foot and guided it to his head.

But she wouldn't set her weight on that foot after all.

"It would smash your brains in!" she cried plaintively down at him. "I just can't bear to step on so gigantic an intellect as yours. I — I might bust some ancient lore that just couldn't be replaced!"

"Do you want to stay down here and starve to death?" he asked sternly.

"N-no ——!"

Then he stiffened his neck as he got her full weight on that foot.

"That's the girl! Never even cracked a hieroglyphic!" he praised her gameness. "How about it now?"

"Slick as l-linoleum!" floated dismally down to him. "I can only reach a little way in, though."

"Can you keep your balance if I lift you up? By golly, you'll have to!"

"By golly, I have my doubts!" she answered him with rueful mimicry. "You don't realize, Mr. Abington, what a precarious position I'm in!"

"No nonsense now. Just hold your legs stiff and don't let your knees bend, and I think we'll make it all right. Stead-y — now!"

He heard a gasp, then he felt her muscles grow rigid; a game young woman, he paid her mental tribute while he slowly lifted her by the ankles. She was scratching the rock for a hand hold — he could hear the small grating sound as her nails dug at the smooth surface. He felt her legs begin to wobble, felt his own muscles trembling with the effort of holding her up. Another minute and both would weaken. She would not make a second attempt, he felt sure; nor could he ask it of her.

"How far are you over the edge?" Try as he would he could not keep the strain from showing in his voice.

"My arms — but it's so smooth!"

"I'm going to heave you in. Give a jump when I push. You've *got* to make it! Now. *In you go!*"

He had not dared give her time to think; had not dared stop to consider what would happen if that last supreme effort of his failed to push her over the edge. Afterward he wondered how they had ever managed it, but by some means they did. When he let go of her ankles he braced himself to receive the shock as

she fell back upon him, but she kicked and wriggled herself in and lay gasping and sobbing with relief. The impossible had been accomplished.

"All right, Miss Pattison. Take your time and rest a little before I throw up the rope," he called cheerfully, when her half hysterical outbreak had subsided. "Once I'm out, the rest is simple; a mere matter of making our way down to the cave in the canyon by a route which I know. As Bill would say, 'Buck up; the worst is yet to come!'"

"All right," she said in a flat tone of reaction. "Throw up the rope and let's get it over with." And then, with a grim little laugh she added, "'No thoroughfare' is right!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

JEAN COMES DOWN

LYING flat on her stomach with both hands outstretched over the edge of rock, Jean caught the upflung coil of rope and pulled it in. That much was simple, a mere detail which elicited no comment from either. But then he remembered that she was in pitch darkness, and called to her to lower an end of the rope so that he could send up the lamp. She did so eagerly, he thought, and smiled to himself at that involuntary betrayal of her feminine weakness.

"Now you can see to fasten the rope firmly to a rock so that I can come up," he cried. "Be careful to make a good job of it, Miss Pattison. Sprained ankles have no business on the trail we'll have to take."

"I know; I'll be careful," she answered him, and for a time there was silence save the muffled sound of her footsteps in the passage and the tinkling drip, drip, drip of water into the pool; the sound which had lured Abington to the spot on his first trip into the mountain. He sat down with his back to the wall and waited, yawning a bit, wishing his matches and cigarettes were not all wet.

It seemed a long time before he heard her coming

again to the entrance over his head, the glow of light from the lamp faintly illuminating the blackness above him. Abington got up and stood back where he could see the opening.

"All right, Miss Pattison?"

The light wavered. Jean's head appeared beside it. Evidently she was down on her knees, guarding against any possibility of a fall. Abington thought her face looked very white and tired, seen beside the livid flame of the carbide lamp.

"There isn't a thing I can fasten the rope to, Mr. Abington," she distressfully announced. "I trailed the rope back as far as it will reach from the edge, and looked along each wall. This tunnel is as smooth as a shotgun! Didn't you know that?"

Abington could have kicked himself for not thinking of that possibility, but there was no help for it now. As a matter of fact, he had thought he knew all about that passage, having been down it once in the dark and again with a light. Being an old water channel, it had no hieroglyphics and so had not interested him except as a way to the Pool of Evil Death, which he was in no haste to examine. He knew that the passage ran back one hundred and seventeen feet, four inches, to its junction with other tunnels which were also water channels — at least two of them were. The rope would not reach that far back.

"I should have thought of that, Miss Pattison, but

I must confess I didn't, so we'll have to think of another way."

"There's only one to think of," she told him unenthusiastically. "I shall have to try and pull you up, I suppose."

"I'm afraid that's the answer," he admitted. "Do you think you can make it?"

"No, I don't! I'm willing to try, however. I tried other impossible things at your suggestion, and have managed to do them, haven't I?"

"You certainly have. Can you take the end of the rope back to where the tunnel narrows, and brace yourself across it, Miss Pattison? In that way you can hold my weight, I believe." And he added with some contrition, "I'm sorry I'm such a big brute, but I only weigh a hundred and seventy-eight pounds, Miss Pattison."

"*Only?* Well, I'll try. I weigh a hundred and two, and I've been ill for months, but there's no telling how much I can lift with my iron jaw."

While he was laughing at that she disappeared again with her light, after dangling the rope end over the edge where he could reach it. After a long while she and her lambent glow of light returned to the orifice.

"Well, what's the matter? Why didn't you climb?" she asked reproachfully.

"Where's the rope? You forgot and took it with you," he reminded her gently.

"I only took one end of it, silly. I left the other for you."

"I'm afraid you pulled it after you, Miss Pattison. It certainly was not left within my reach, though of course in the dark I could see nothing. Still, I have been feeling along the wall for it."

He heard an exclamation of dismay.

"The rope simply isn't long enough to reach back to the narrow part. What are we going to do?"

"We'll try it without the brace," he said. "The wall is so smooth down here that I can't help much, I'm afraid."

"You know this floor slopes down to the edge, so don't pull any harder than is necessary, will you?"

"Certainly not, Miss Pattison. Shall we try it now?"

She shook the rope end down to him and once more disappeared into the opening, and Abington pressed his lips together and began climbing.

A startled shriek stopped him. Jean came sliding down to the very brink before she could check herself. Abington jumped back and prepared to break her fall, but she managed to stick, then crept back again to where she had set the lamp. In a moment her white face looked down at him.

"I tried, but I simply can't do it," she said, shivering a little with nervousness and the chill of her wet garments. "It's too smooth up here. Mr. Abington,

what on earth shall we do?" She was trying her best to be brave, but he felt that she was not far from tears and the thought galled him.

"We'll take it easy, Miss Pattison. Perhaps after you have rested ——"

"It's of no use, I tell you. Resting isn't going to give me the weight to match your weight, nor put knobs on this rock to hang on by. The moment you pulled on the rope it was like — like being towed with a truck! I just skidded along, with no way of stopping myself."

He was silent for a space, looking up at her reflectively, knowing how clearly she had stated a disquieting fact. The girl was too slight to hold his weight or anywhere near it. He tried to recall some near-by passage where she could find loose rocks — but there again the lack of strength would render her powerless to move any rocks big enough to be of the slightest use.

He turned and stared up into the blackness of the vaulted roof of the pool. Once he had climbed up to the mouth of the passage and had got out of the caves by way of the ridge. True enough; but he had risked his neck many times over in accomplishing that feat, and he knew that the girl could never do it. He had been obliged to climb above the tunnel and drop down to the shelf of rock which protruded above the pool — and though the height was not so great as

he had believed it, climbing in the dark as he had done (for a carbide lamp lights no great zone) he would not like to drop into the water and be obliged to climb again.

Still, this smooth, straight wall between the girl and himself was absolutely unscalable without help, and the other was not. Jean could not make it, but he had succeeded once, and therefore he probably would succeed again. Then ——

"There's one way out, Miss Pattison. I can climb up to the ledge where I jumped in, then make it down the ridge and around to the cave which I told you of, and come back that way and get you. I shall need the lamp. I'm sorry, but it would be impossible to climb that wall in the dark."

"I thought you said it was impossible to get down the ridge," she challenged the plan.

"In the dark, I said you should not risk it. If your watch has not stopped I think you will find that it is close to morning, Miss Pattison. Certainly it would be broad daylight by the time I reached the ridge."

"Yes — and how long before you got back here?"

Abington made a rapid mental calculation.

"Two hours and I could make it. It would take over an hour to reach the cave under favorable circumstances. There are a couple of rather difficult hills to climb over, you see."

She said nothing, but presently the rope shook violently.

"Let's try the tow-line again, Mr. Abington. This time I'll bite a chunk out of the darned rock but what I'll hang on!"

"I don't think it's of any use, Miss Pattison."

She was back at the edge again, leaning over to argue the point.

"It's just as much use as your talk about climbing that other wall!"

"No," he said patiently, "because I've climbed up that way once and I know positively that it can be done."

"Under favorable circumstances," she mocked. "No, try the rope again."

"Very well," he agreed, to please her. But he pulled half-heartedly, knowing that she must beg him to stop. Which she did. In another minute she was peering down at him, tilting the lamp to throw the light his way.

"Do you think you can catch me when I jump?" she asked. "Because I'm coming down."

"No, you must stay where you are until I come after you."

"Indeed I'll not! Will you please tell me how I'm any better off here? If I must stay here for hours alone in the dark, I'd much rather be down there, Mr. Abington, where I can have a wall at my back and

the pool in front of me. I'm not afraid of the water, and these black tunnels stretching away behind me — I don't like them, Mr. Abington." She drew back and swung her feet over the edge. "I'll send the lamp down first," she said.

Abington shook his head.

"After all the trouble you had getting up there, I don't see what you want to come back for. It isn't so cheerful down here." He shrugged, and the gesture lacked little of being a shudder.

"I wouldn't have come, but I thought you were coming too." She was drawing the hook on the lamp through a knot in the rope and her voice sounded small and lonesome.

Pity surged up into the foreground of Abington's mind. What an awful experience this was for her, and how bravely she was meeting it! She must know that their very lives were in danger, he thought. For a moment he wondered if it would not be possible to send her on down through the labyrinth alone — but no, that was impossible. Once she lost the way he might be days finding her again; if he got out, he added grimly. Too well he knew what a misstep would do when he started climbing. There was no certainty that he would strike the water in falling.

The lamp came bobbing down to him and he caught and held it in his hand, anxiously debating the wisdom of letting her come back. If anything happened to

him she might possibly make her way down to the cave — but no, he would have the light; without it he would be helpless. He could not see the opening of the passage above, could not make his way to the point just over the ledge where he must jump for the rock. She would be in the dark, and there was not one chance in ten thousand that she would ever find her way out of the hill.

Heartsick for the plight she was in, he set down the lamp and opened his arms for her.

"Jump, Jean," he said, in an odd, half-tender tone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

JEAN DIVES UNDER THE WALL

THE warm human contact of that moment when he held her tightly in his arms seemed to hearten them both, though they tried to ignore it. Jean laughed shakily as she clung to him while she got her balance, and Abington's eyes were almost glowing when he released her.

"I don't approve of your undoing all that effort of getting up there," he said, with an attempt at his old impersonal tone. "But since you're here — just dropped in, as it were — let's see about making you comfortable. With my coat for a pillow don't you think you might sleep while I'm gone?"

"No," she instantly replied. "Because I'm going with you. That's what I came down for."

"I'm sorry, but that's impossible."

"I'm beginning to think that nothing's impossible, Mr. Abington. Except, perhaps, staying here for hours alone in the dark."

"I dislike to argue the point, Miss Pattison, but it simply cannot be done. I climbed up there once — over there on the opposite wall where it slopes back a bit — and I considered it almost a miracle of good

luck that I did not break my neck. I never dreamed that I should ever place myself in a position where it would be necessary to repeat the performance. To get up to that ledge, Miss Pattison, one must use both hands and all his fingers and as much faith in God as he can muster. The only way I found of reaching the ledge was from above, which makes it necessary to work sidewise to a point directly over the tunnel, and drop ten or twelve feet. I did it once, or I shouldn't be here. I'm hoping I can do it again. Certainly it would be absolutely suicidal for you to try it."

Abington was spraying the light across the pool, revealing patches of the dank stone with one receding wall scarred here and there with a splintered roughness worn smoothly into knobby excrescences that offered a precarious footing to a man sufficiently tall and agile. He held the light there so that she could see for herself how perilous it was.

She sighed and turned away, searching the shadows with her eyes.

"That wall straight up from the water, over there. The current sets in that direction," she said finally, holding her fingers in the water. "There must be some sort of outlet, Mr. Abington. Let's take the light over there and see."

"Some hole in the rock, but that doesn't help us any," he asserted, though he went with her, carrying the lamp.

"Oh, but it might help considerably," she declared. "One thing I do know, Mr. Abington, and that's water. I've swum and dove and played with the water ever since I can remember. There is probably an inlet under the surface, and also an outlet; but the current seems to me too gentle to be pouring down through a hole in the bottom. This is a very cavey mountain ——"

"Yes — very cavey," he assented, grinning at the word.

"Well, before you start climbing that wall like a fly, Mr. Abington, I'd just like to investigate this pool. I have a — what Aunt Betsy would call a hunch, and it's a strong one. I'll just take off these heavy boots and my sweater, and go in there and see how about it."

The suggestion struck with a chill which reached Abington's heart and set it beating sluggishly.

"No!" he said sharply. "I can't let you do that. You might be drawn into some subterranean channel — it's altogether too dangerous."

"Tie that rope around me, then. It's all right; I know it's all right. Anyway, I'm going."

"No, you're not. I shall not let you go."

"But I *will* go, Mr. Abington!"

"I'm damned if you will!"

"I'm — we're both damned if I don't! There! Must I dive in without the rope, then, and with curses

on my lips?" Her eyes looked very big and bright and her mouth was thin and straight. Then all at once she laughed.

"Don't look so horrified, Mr. Abington. I'll explain why I'm going in. At home we have caves, and underground pools and cascades and all that, and I know them by heart. Somehow this place reminds me of what we call the Upper Pool at home, where a rock wall drops down and divides it from Middle Pool, and another wall cuts that off from Lower Pool. They're lighted, of course, because it's a favorite summer swimming place, and we dive under the wall and go from one to the other. The current is about like it is here — and doesn't it seem reasonable, Mr. Abington, to guess that Nature may repeat herself the same as history is supposed to do?"

"It certainly is not reasonable to stake your life on such a guess," he said shortly.

"It certainly is just as reasonable as to stake *your* life on climbing that wall over there!" she made indignant reply, and sat down to unlace her boots. "I don't want to be obstinate about it, but I have a feeling about this place which I can't quite explain. I seem to *know*."

She looked up at him with a puzzled expression, silently questioning his superior knowledge. And after a moment Abington yielded the point by picking up the rope. She had known the way to the jump-off

into the pool so well that she had walked to it unerringly in the dark. The whole thing was monstrously improbable — but who was he to insist that she did not know her way out of the Pool of Evil Death? She had known the way into it, that was certain. She had apparently come of her own accord and she had seemed surprisingly cheerful over it. He shook his head, refusing to analyze the enigma further. At all events, with the rope tied securely around her (He would see to its secureness!) he could pull her back if she seemed in danger. To his scientifically trained mind the whole adventure was beginning to smack of melodrama, and his nerves were being rasped by it. Yet a certain sturdy determination to bear the brunt of the unpleasantness made him speak.

"If you really feel that it's worth while to explore under water, at least let me do it," he said. "I'm no expert at aquatic sports, but I think I can manage to find out where the water goes to."

She stood up in her stocking feet, looking smaller and more childlike than ever as she pulled off her sweater. No wonder she could not hold his weight on the rope! He felt a brute for letting her try it.

"Tie a good knot," she smiled, "for your own peace of mind, Mr. Abington. And never mind trying to be chivalrous. One thing I do know is water. I've won swimming and diving contests ever since I was twelve years old. I really don't mind this little

stunt in the least, and I somehow feel sure it's going to solve our problem for us. Now, wish me luck and don't worry."

She stood poised on the brink of the pool for a moment and then suddenly she curved her slim body and dropped forward in a clean, effortless dive that clove the black water and carried her far toward the rock wall which had roused her curiosity. The knotted rope trailed behind her, sagging foot by foot into the water and giving Abington a very fair idea of the progress she was making.

A minute passed, during which he sprayed the widening ripples with the light, his gaze fixed anxiously upon the spot where she had disappeared; watching too the gently swaying rope which kept dragging out and out until the untidy coil at his feet had slowly unwound and he could feel the slight twitching of the line in his hand. Fifty feet long was that rope after the knots were tied for easy climbing. In their explorations he and Bill had never found a need for half the length, but now the rope was sloping straight from his hand to the point where it entered the water. To the rock wall the distance was no more than twenty feet from where he stood.

Cold beads of moisture stood out upon Abington's forehead as the seconds passed. A man whose boast it was that fear and he were not speaking acquaintances, he suddenly found himself gasping for air and

knew that he had been holding his breath. There had been no struggle, no jerking of the rope — but the girl must have been gone ten minutes at least! Or was that merely his imagination? Say five — no mortal woman could remain for five minutes under water, and he didn't care how many diving contests she had won. She must have struck her head against the rock; perhaps it was the current tugging at her inert body that had pulled the rope out — she may be dead while he stood there like a fool and held the rope.

Without thinking further than that, John Abington, the cool, impersonal, steel-nerved scientist, began to pull in the rope with frantic haste, hand over hand.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

JEAN TAKES THE LEAD

THE water broke in white-tipped waves, very much as if he were landing a fish with a trawling line. One arm flung up in a swift racing stroke and Jean reached the rim of the pool, tossing her bobbed hair back out of her eyes as she lifted herself with both hands gripping the rock.

"Well, you big sap!" she cried indignantly, reverting to the rude jargon of modern youth at play. "What on earth did you haul me in for? Don't you know you yanked me backwards off a rock and made me swallow a quart of water? What's the matter, anyway? Mamma's 'ittle boy 'fraid to stay alone?"

Abington's jaw sagged, then he threw back his head and laughed aloud in sheer, boyish relief. But his voice had a grim note when he answered her.

"Young lady, what business had you staying under water so long? It was my duty to haul you in and have a look at you, after you'd been in just so long without a nibble. I always look at my bait now and then when I'm fishing."

With her two palms Jean wiped the water from her face and then squinted up at him, her feet swinging

in the water with a carefree movement that further robbed the situation of any tenseness.

"You caught another cave with your bait — know that? What's more, there was a sort of a breeze in it that seemed to promise a look at the outside world. Of course I couldn't tell much about it in the dark, and the rope wouldn't let me get far enough to do any good. But I was out of the water on a stone bank like this one, Mr. Abington, resting and feeling around for the wall and trying to see where the breeze came from, when you yanked me back into the water. The tunnel under that wall isn't long; not more than ten or twelve feet, I should judge. Don't you think we ought to move over to that pool and explore? There's some way out — I *know* it. I feel as if we're simply wasting time in here, Mr. Abington."

"Certainly we'll explore the place. I think, however, we should arrange some way of finding our tunnel again. I can climb this wall, you know, if worst comes to worst. And once up there I can let down this rope, and if it isn't long enough to reach you, I can hustle down to camp and get another one to splice on. That way, you needn't wait so long for your rescue, Miss Pattison. I should have thought of that in the first place." He looked down at her, sitting there dangling her feet in the water, and thought how easy it would be to draw her up to the tunnel with a rope.

"I really think it's worth trying, Miss Pattison, unless we are fortunate enough to find an outlet from the other cave without much trouble," he added.

"You haven't much faith in my hunch, I see. Well, I could easily locate the tunnel again, if you want to come back. Or we can trail the rope through. We'd need a rock or something on the end, though, to keep it from being carried clear through with the current."

She was reaching for her soggy boots, and now she pulled them on and laced them just enough to hold them on.

"It's such a little way through," she explained, looking up at him. "What about the light, Mr. Abington? We'll need it on the other side."

"I'll put it out and carry it in my pocket, just as I did when I jumped in here. The rope remains fastened to you, young lady. I shouldn't want to lose you in the dark."

She laughed, a bit shyly if the truth were known.

"Hang on, then, and I'll take you through," she bantered him, and looked again at the rock to get her bearings. "Or if you prefer, we can slide into the water close to the wall and swim along it to the opening. But I think it's nearer to go straight across, and besides, you slide right up to it in a dive. It saves a lot of breath if you aren't very good at swimming under the surface."

He was coiling the rope until a scant six feet of slack was left between them. Now he gave her a long, unreadable look, nodded and shut off the light.

"All right," he said quietly. "You take the lead and I'll follow."

Unused to swimming under water, his lungs were taxed with the effort of doing without air until the twitching of the rope signaled him to come up. A cool breeze fanned his face and gave him hope that the girl's guess was correct. He hauled himself out on the bank, felt her sitting close beside him and very sensibly gave his first attention to the lamp. It was stubborn at lighting but at last the welcome little cat-claw of white flame appeared and grew brighter as he coaxed it with the valve.

Sitting there beside Jean on the brink of this strange pool, he turned the lamp this way and that, examining the place they were in. The absence of hieroglyphics inclined him to the belief that this pool had not been accessible to the ancients. With the water at a much higher level than now, the tunnel had probably been unsuspected, he supposed. That, or it had worn to its present spaciousness in later times.

"Well," he said at last, rising and helping her up, "there certainly is a current of air coming in from the outside. Also I hear the gurgle of a stream somewhere. Let's hope this is the way out, Miss Pattison."

"I know it's the way out," Jean said firmly. "I can't tell why, but it's over there. Come on and see if I'm not right."

She led him confidently along the bank, straight toward the gurgling sound, and presently they were looking down a rough, high-vaulted channel where a small stream lipped over the edge of the pool and went slipping down among the rocks. Jean laughed triumphantly, glancing up into Abington's face to see how much he shared her optimism.

"There it is, the way out. Don't ask me how I know — I just feel that I'm right. No use looking for other tunnels, Mr. Abington — I'm going this way."

"In that case," he retorted drily, "I must beg you to let me come along. I must point out, however, that in case we are forced to return, the rocks down there will not be easy climbing. They're pretty well polished, you'll notice."

"I don't care about that — we're not coming back this way."

With that for the final word on the subject they started down, Abington with the light and the rope. He was careful not to remind Jean that she still had the rope fastened around her waist, and if she remembered it she did not mention the fact but went along fearlessly, clambering down over slimy boulders, sometimes lifted bodily by Abington who went silently,

grimly about the work, taking careful note of the route, so that, if it came to going back again, he would not mistake the way.

An inexplicable, alert cheerfulness seemed to have taken hold of Jean. It was as if they were clambering about on a holiday. Not once did she exhibit any sign of weariness or seem dismayed when they must make a choice from two or three passages all very much alike. Abington let her say which way they should go — but his judgment always approved her choice, he remembered afterward. Enough for him to hold the light for her and to guard her against stumbling.

Here the passages were fewer and for the most part they were extremely rough. It was as if the mountain had been wrenched and twisted, leaving great fissures which formed a network treacherous in the extreme, since there was no indication that men had traversed these channels nor assurance that they would open to the surface anywhere.

"You seem to have overlooked the fact that we have left that breeze behind us, Miss Pattison," he observed at last.

"I know. I mentioned the breeze just to get you to come this way. It was high up somewhere in that first cave, I think. We're going down fast. Pretty soon we should be at the bottom, don't you think, Mr. Abington?"

"Or below it," Abington thought savagely, though he very wisely refrained from saying it.

Though there was no reason why he should be surprised, it was with a startled exclamation that he turned the light accidentally on the first hieroglyphics he had seen since diving under the wall. But Jean seemed restless when he lingered to decipher them, and they went on, Abington considerably relieved. How she had known the way he made no attempt to fathom, but certainly she had led him into man-made channels again. But suddenly she drew back from an innocent-looking passage and gave a slight shiver.

"I'm afraid of that one," she murmured. "I don't know why, but I've a feeling it goes down — ugh! Let's turn here."

That turn brought them to a curious, smooth-floored cave with straight walls covered with hieroglyphics and a walled passage opposite their entrance. The place interested Abington, in spite of his longing for the open air. Jean stood looking reflectively at the piled stones, then turned and regarded him with a curious half smile.

"Don't you suppose there's something beyond those stones?" she asked. "I'm tired and I want to rest, so if you'd like to look, I think ——" She passed her fingers wearily over her eyes. "Let's rest," she said abruptly. "I believe we're almost out, Mr. Abington." She sat down flat on the floor and leaned her

head against the wall, for the first time since they left the pool giving way to complete lassitude. "You take the lead now," she said dully. "I'm all in."

She looked it, and the change was so abrupt that Abington stared at her curiously, the lamp glowing full upon her slack figure. And while he watched she shivered, gave a long sigh and let her eyelids droop slowly over her eyes as if they were weighted with drugged sleep.

Again that mocking, half-tender laugh which had so startled Abington earlier in the night.

"Well, man of wisdom, I have brought you safely down the mountain," she said in the altered voice. "This little girl who led you to this spot does not dream whose spirit walked beside her, whispering which way to go. Do not frighten her when she wakes, man of wisdom, but guard her well and let your own heart speak the thing you would hide deep within it. You cannot hide your heart from me, remember. I see there the flower of love growing timidly, so do not crush it with the weight of your scientific ambitions but rather let it grow. It will sweeten your whole life — if so be that life is worth your fighting for it.

"Let this child rest a while, and search you this chamber. Throw down the piled stones in the doorway, man of wisdom, and see what lies beyond. And when you have led this sweet child safely to that other

woman who is very anxious for her, come you back again and search further for the treasure that lies hidden here. I may not tell you what it is nor where; but search you well, oh, man of wisdom, and when you have found it remember the warning I have given you. Farewell. This one who lived so long ago, even when you trod these echoing chambers and loved her well, this one is weary and should rest. So let her be, my friend, for there is no need of great haste to be gone. The storm yet howls through the hills and dawn is yet to come."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

"BILL'S STONE ADAMSES, BY THUNDER!"

As once before, Abington sat where the light shone full upon Jean's face and watched her narrowly. And as before he was forced to admit to himself that she was frankly and unaffectedly asleep; the normal sleep of a weary body after unusual exercise. And so at last his reluctant mind made another concession.

"Natural medium — susceptible to control when tired — probably never conscious of the fact. Hm-mm — never took any stock in spirit control — must be something in it, though — after what I've seen tonight I've got to believe — princess — hm-mm — wonder how much truth lies back of that vague prophecy!"

He, too, was tired, but after a fifteen-minute rest he got up rather stiffly, took the lamp and went over to the walled passage. Here the upper stones had fallen away, revealing the roof of another tunnel, but below that huge stones were built up into an irregular wall that completely blocked the opening. All of the rocks were as much as a man would care to lift alone, and a few of them must weigh hundreds of pounds — though these were at the bottom and might remain

where they were without impeding his further penetration of the tunnel, he thought.

But Jean was asleep within a few feet of the place and he was afraid to begin tearing down the wall while she was so near. He decided therefore to wait until she awoke before he started any investigation. Meantime he would search for other outlets.

Though he hesitated to leave the girl there alone, a survey of the chamber showed him nothing that could possibly harm her, and the spirits — if spirits there were! — seemed kindly, protective ones. He decided to waste no time but to let her rest where she was until he had explored. He had not gone far along a crooked fissure which was the third he entered until a chill wind swooped in and nipped at his face.

Fifty feet farther he went, climbing over boulders and going upward at a varying angle while the wind grew stronger. Now he could hear the whistle of the storm and his heart gave a leap. The next he knew he was scrambling up through a wide chimney where the fissure made a sharp elbow, and with a last kick and a heave he was in the open air with sleety rain beating down upon him and the dying flame of his lamp flickering and threatening to go out altogether.

"Hm-mm! The 'princess' was right, by Jove!" was his first clear thought. "Not daylight yet — and I'd have sworn it was getting close to noon!"

Then he remembered that he had filled the lamp

only once since its first load of carbide in the evening. That second filling had been made near midnight, and though he had added water twice since then, the carbide needed changing or the gas would cease to form and the lamp would go out. He therefore crawled back down into a sheltered nook and unscrewed the bottom of the lamp, shaking out the old carbide and adding new lumps. Then with the water tank refilled, he whirled the lighter and got a bright flame before he attempted the return to Jean.

She had slid sidewise and was lying curled up like a kitten for warmth in her damp clothes. Abington took off his coat and spread it over her, though it too was still wet from the pool. She had forgotten her sweater when she made that last trip under the wall, and Abington's shoulders lifted at the thought of how long it might stay where it was; not for many sweaters would he return to that evil place — though when he came to think of it, he had only to send Bill down from the old watercourse on the rope. Bill could not read hieroglyphics well enough to sense the full horror of the place, and it would not take more than a few minutes. Yes, after all, Jean should have her sweater again.

Abington stood looking at her, dreading to disturb her slumber yet wishing she would waken and hear the good news. But with daylight an hour or two away, there was no hurry, and it was best that she

should sleep." With a half-tender, half-apologetic look in his eyes he lifted her in his arms and carried her over and laid her down at a safe distance from the walled opening. Now that he knew the way to the outside world, knew also that he could do no more for Jean's present comfort, his mind turned to research work and he was conscious of a keen desire to know what lay beyond that wall.

As the third rock clattered down and rolled echoing dully across the stone floor, Jean awoke and came over to stand and watch the work, yawning prodigiously after her nap.

"Do you think that is the way out?" she asked, when another stone came down. "I'm nearly starved." And she shivered as if she might truthfully have added that she was also cold.

"This is a bit of exploration which may or may not be of immediate practical value," Abington told her, while he examined the remainder of the barrier, choosing which rock he should next attempt to move. "I've found a way outside, thank the Lord. But as it's still dark and stormy, we are better off right where we are until we can see to travel. I know of no better way of putting in the time; do you?"

"I suppose not," she agreed listlessly. "A place that has been walled up always excites one's curiosity, doesn't it? I suppose you've no idea where we are, Mr. Abington."

"Well, I know we are in the Valley of Fire, somewhere near the base of a mountain, or hill, which I have found interesting. I've no idea how far we are from my camp — or yours, but it can't be far, since it's in this mountain. Too dark outside to see anything yet."

"Well," sighed Jean, "I hope you find chests of jewels and silver candlesticks and ancient coins, Mr. Abington."

Abington laughed at her and went on working the rock loose with his hands and straining muscles. When that rock came down two others, keyed into the opening, came with it and so enlarged the hole that even Jean would not find it difficult to get through. He picked up the lamp and held out his hand to her.

"Give you the first look," he grinned. "When it comes to going through, however, I think I shall first make sure it's all right. Here, take the lamp and satisfy your feminine curiosity; you've earned the right, Miss Pattison, and the honor is yours."

So Jean was the first to look, holding the lamp so that its light shone full through the hole. Abington helped her up to one of the fallen rocks and steadied her there, watching her face to read in her eyes whether anything of interest lay beyond. So he saw her eyes widen and stare, saw the slow horror creep into them as the full import of some hideous object reached her shocked mind. And then, just as he was

about to lift her down and take a look for himself, she gave a shriek and turned away, gripping his shoulders tight in her two hands.

"What is it — Jean?" he asked quickly, holding her close.

"Dead people — ugh!" and she shivered and clung the tighter until she remembered and released herself in some confusion for her boldness.

Abington seized the lamp and brushed past her, held the light up so that it would shine through the opening and then lifted his long legs over the barrier.

"Bill's stone Adamses, by thunder! Corpses ten thousand years ago, perhaps, but now, my dear girl, they are stone relics more priceless than jewels! Come and look! Here, let me help you through. They won't hurt you — they aren't even human any longer. What was bone has fossilized — you aren't afraid of *rock*, are you?"

He stood gloating over the find: Four human fossils in a row, and the size of them made even John Abington blink.

"'And there were giants in those days,'" he said soberly, turning to help Jean through the opening. "I've always believed it, but now I *know*. Miss Pattison — Jean — this is one of the biggest moments in my life." He cast a sidelong look at her half-frightened face. "May I say I'm glad you are here to share it with me?"

"You may, Mr. Abington. Why, they — they look like mummies!" she cried in an awed half whisper.

Abington had not released the arm he had taken to assist her over the rocks. Now he tightened his hold.

"Just here, before I explain the reason for that mummified appearance, let me say that I think it's about time you were calling me John. As a — a memorial of this discovery," he added lamely, stammering like a schoolboy. Probably no one had ever before seen John Abington actually embarrassed to the point of stuttering.

"So that's your Adam!" was Jean's sole comment, and laughed a bit shakily, not meeting his eyes.

"My men of the Cretaceous period," Abington assented, his voice chilled by the apparent rebuff. "None but an archæologist could apprehend the full significance of this discovery, which sets back the human occupancy of America to a period so remote that all history must be rewritten in the future; at least, in regard to the origin of the human race in America." He left her side and went forward to examine the grewsome relics gloatingly, estimating their great length, kneeling to get a closer look at the matrix in which they seemed to be embedded. He was talking to himself, and he seemed to have forgotten Jean until she recalled him to his surroundings.

"And while you worship those stone people you're letting me starve to death — John!"

CHAPTER THIRTY

FORTUNE FOR FOUR

"And so you're an archæologist!" Betsy O'Donovan held out a gray enamel cup for its second filling of strong, black coffee such as only Bill could make, and regarded Abington steadfastly with her sweet, inscrutable smile. She took a sip of the hot brew which was of a strength to make her blink, and all at once she set down the cup, threw back her head and laughed her ringing, merry ha-ha.

"What a lot of time I wasted last night!" she exclaimed, when the three in the walled tent were sufficiently curious over her mirth. "I spent the night huddled behind a tiny sage-brush fire under a ledge which would scarcely shelter a coyote, and what time I did not put in searching for dry sticks to feed my Indian blaze and worrying over my niece, here, I devoted to you, Mr. Abington, wondering how I should approach you in order to get the very best deal out of Strombergs for my carnotite discovery. Now I find that you are not interested in such practical, commercial things as radium-bearing ore. A petrified bone means more to you, I suppose, than a million-dollar mine."

"Petrified bone!" Jean put in at this point, while

she buttered the third sourdough hotcake which Bill laid upon her plate. "Aunt Betsy, you just ought to see what we found! Four petrified people as long as from here to that door, if you please, with heads on them that big around!" With finger tips touching, Jean's arms described a circle.

"Them's my stone Adamses," Bill declared pridefully. "You held out on me, Professor. Why didn't you tell me when you got here that you'd found 'em?"

"Didn't want to distract your mind from breakfast, Bill," Abington drily retorted. "You know you're likely to get too much soda in the sourdough when you're excited. Miss Pattison and I were famished. Yes," he added, "I think we found your stone Adamses, Bill."

"Stone images, I suppose you mean," Betsy O'Donovan carelessly observed. "That must be what Jim Joe and Holy Moses were driving at when they said the stone people lived in these mountains and did not want any one to come here. You remember, Jean, they kept muttering about the stone people. They tried every way in the world to turn me back, and when I forced them to come this far they took the burros and ran; or turned the burros toward home, which amounts to the same thing. And though I haven't spoken of it before to my niece, who would have been frightened, they also helped themselves to my Ford."

"I think," Abington said quietly, "you need not concern yourself over your niece's timidity, Mrs. O'Donovan. Her courage, as it manifested itself last night, would put many a man to shame."

"It wasn't a case of hiking eight or ten miles or twenty through the sand," Betsy maintained. "Jean is no coward or she wouldn't be kin to Betsy O'Donovan, but she *is* afraid of wearing out her boots! She'll never make a prospector, but on the other hand it won't be necessary that she should. If I'm not badly mistaken in my ore, we'll be prospecting amongst the art galleries and cathedrals of Europe before the winter is gone. I've found what I came after, Jean dear, and now we'll have that trip around the world and take our time for it, too."

Taken off guard, Abington sent a quick, frowning glance from one to the other and Bill swallowed a grin with his coffee. Not much was hidden from Bill's sharp eyes, though he did not mention all that he saw. Now he threw back his shoulders and tapped himself on the chest.

"Just one of our Adamses is good for a trip around the world if we wanted to take one. Ain't that right, Professor?"

"Yes, even from a commercial standpoint I'd prefer the Cretaceous men, Mrs. O'Donovan. They'll be difficult to move, but they're worth a fortune to the finders." He glanced at Jean. "I must declare Miss

Pattison a partner in the expedition, I think. She really led me to the spot where they lay hidden just beyond a walled opening. Had she not been with me, a very important system of caves would have remained undiscovered, so far as I am concerned."

"I?" Jean in her astonishment came near choking. "Why, I didn't do a thing, Mr. Abington — except perhaps trying for that second pool; but from there on, you just helped me down places that I was scared stiff over. I don't remember being anything except a nuisance, so I really can't accept any share in the stone giants. Aunt Betsy, you simply can't realize how big they are!"

"Eight feet high," Bill reiterated proudly. "I measured 'em myself."

"You certainly have the scientific minds, all of you," sighed Betsy. "Do you know that I can't think of another three persons in Nevada who would meet the news of a carnotite discovery with so casual an air? Not when Betsy O'Donovan announced the discovery, at any rate! What's the matter with you folks, if I may ask? Do you really believe that Indian writings on the walls of a cave and a few stone images of unusual size are of more importance than carnotite running, I'll venture to say, a hundred thousand dollars to the ton — and a ton of it in sight?" Her shrewd, blue eyes went slowly from one face to the other, dwelling longest upon Jean. "Jean,

honey, that trip is as good as started. Don't you realize what it means? I've found the carnotite deposit I came after, and the one great obstacle to realizing on it seems to be completely wiped out, since Mr. Abington is not a Stromberg man but merely a scientist. Betsy O'Donovan has made the rich strike she's always dreamed about — and not one of you seems anything but bored with the news!"

"You mustn't say 'merely a scientist', Aunt Betsy, in that slighting tone. Mr. Abington can talk *beautifully* about how the world began, and everything. Of course, I'm glad you found your mine; I'm pleased to pieces."

"Yes, you act pleased to pieces!" snapped Aunt Betsy. "Science has done wonders for your color and your appetite, I'll say that much!"

"That's my cookin'," Bill put in. "Maybe the Professor oughta tell you straight out about that carnotite mine you think you found. Go on, Professor. Better tell her about Jack Huntley and git it over with. He's a darned disagreeable subject in this camp, but it ain't right to let her go on thinkin' she's found something she ain't."

"Do you mean Jack Huntley located that ground ahead of me?" Betsy's eyes grew hard. "Let me tell you, then, that I grubstaked Jack Huntley to come in here and look for that carnotite. He came to me and described a certain formation he wanted to prospect,

and I outfitted him on a fifty-fifty basis, according to custom. He died up here not long ago before he discovered the ledge ——"

"Yes'm, we was here when he died," Bill interrupted. "If you ladies will excuse me, Jack Huntley was a skunk, any way you was a mind to take him. He just about landed me in Carson, for one thing, and what he wanted up here, Mis' O'Donovan ——"

"Betsy," she corrected sharply.

"What he wanted up here, Mis' Betsy, was to keep outa my sight till I was safe in the pen. Then he thought he'd found a carnotite mine, and he was tryin' to hog it by scarin' everybody outa the country. And the stuff he was hoarding — say, Professor, you better tell it."

"I'm sorry," Abington said soberly, "but what Jack Huntley found was not carnotite at all, Mrs. O'Donovan, it ——"

"Betsy, Mr. Abington. Betsy's my desert name and Betsy I prefer to be called. Go on."

"What he found, er — Betsy, was limonite; a yellow ocher ——"

"Mr. Abington, I've analyzed and assayed mineral for the last twenty years. Don't tell me what limonite is, because I know it in the dark. I've had sacks of it brought to me by poor deluded old prospectors who fairly wept when they saw their air castles totter." She stopped and smiled her peculiar, Betsy

O'Donovan smile and reached into the sagging pocket of her disreputable old gray sweater which was drying by Bill's breakfast fire.

"Did Jack Huntley's ore, by any chance, resemble this, Mr. Abington?"

Abington's eyes lighted up as he took the small specimen in his hand and turned it toward the gray light of the morning that filtered through the wet tent roof.

"It did not." He looked across at Betsy with twitching lips. "If you have a ton of that in sight, you surely can sail round the world as often as you like!"

"Lemme see!" cried Bill, reaching unceremoniously over Jean's head. "That the clear quill, Professor?"

"Yes, I think you may call it the clear quill. Mrs. — er — Betsy, I must congratulate you! To you that is as rich a strike as my stone men are to me. If it is all like that, you certainly need never tramp the desert again."

"Or crank a Ford," Betsy supplemented with a huge sigh of content. "I've a bit more tramping to do, when this storm is over. I mean to make a thorough examination of that locality, and take an extension claim or two if the formation seems to warrant it. Carnotite is very apt to run in pockets, as perhaps you know. This appeared to be in vein formation, but I'm not certain of that yet. It was

rather late in the afternoon when I discovered it, and then the storm struck with such fury that I was forced to seek shelter under a ledge. I was so worried over Jean that I struck out for camp at the first break of day. When I found no camp and no niece, I hurried on over here — fortunately arriving when you two did, or I believe I should have gone quite distracted and lost all memory of where that ledge is! I can't wonder that none of my prospectors ever succeeded in finding it; there has been so much faulting and the formation is so twisted that it takes a good deal of imagination to guess where to look for anything."

"A good knowledge of geology, I should like to add. Does it strike you as strange, Mrs. — Betsy, that you and I should realize the fulfillment of our hopes at practically the same time?"

"But mine are not fulfilled until I have in my fingers a check signed by Strombergs," said Betsy, with what might be called a complete lack of imagination. "Finding the ore is merely the first step toward a fortune, Mr. Abington. The next thing is to sell it and get the money."

"My name is John. My friends call me Jack," said Abington, with twitching lips. "As a celebration of our good luck ——" Then he caught Bill's popping eyes and halted abruptly.

"Jack it is," said Betsy with cheerful unconcern, while Jean bit her lip at the memory of another request

which lost much of its apparent significance now.

"As for me," Abington went on, rather hurriedly for him, "I have yet to extricate my stone men from their present position and deliver them safely to some point where they will be more accessible to science. So I may say that I, too, have merely accomplished the first step toward fame and fortune. I shall need a crew of men for that work of removing the remains, however, and that needs some preparation. There is no great hurry and I wish to do some further exploration in the mountain. It seems to have been a real citadel in ancient times, probably occupied mostly by the ruling class or the priesthood. They must have left something more than I have found; something that has endured through the ages. I think I shall leave the stone men where they are until I have finished with the hill.

"So if you need Bill, I can easily lend you his services for a few days — Betsy. Building monuments is heavy work for a woman. And by the way, I have a transit and shall be glad to run your lines for you if you wish. I couldn't tie them to any Government base line without a good deal of work, because of course this valley is unsurveyed. But if you are taking more than one claim, I can at least see that you don't overlap your lines or leave a fraction between."

"Jack Abington, your name goes on my page of blessings! I don't, of course, know how I can repay

you, but there'll come a chance some day. I'll borrow Bill to try and do something with our poor camp. Things are scattered and blown full of sand, and the tent is down and whipped to pieces. I didn't stay to examine the extent of the damage, but it was enough to make a statue weep. I came right on over to see if you had by chance seen anything of Jean ——"

"He saw a good deal of Jean," that young woman observed. "We quarreled for hours, and then we were too busy trying to get out of the mess we were in. I've had adventures, Aunt Betsy, to make your hair curl tight to your head. Mr. Abington dropped me down a trap door or some such hole in a pool of water in a cave, and then he jumped after me and we had the awfulest time getting out of there! But finally we did, and came on down and found the stone mummies that Bill calls Adam. I'm sure they look old enough to be Adam and Eve and their family; only, Aunt Betsy, they're so unearthly *big*. And of course this is no Garden of Eden, so it couldn't possibly be Adam and Eve."

Abington gave her a long, curious stare which brought the hot blood to her cheeks.

"After my long and erudite discourse on ancient civilizations, all that you seem to have grasped is the fact that the Garden of Eden was not located in the Valley of Fire!" he mocked. "I remember calling you a bright pupil, too!"

But what he really was thinking of was the way Jean had looked last night when she first spoke to him in the voice of one who claimed to be a princess of long ago. He was recalling her swift flow of words which betrayed an intimate knowledge of those caves and of the giant race which dwelt there. The mystery of that speech struck him anew here at breakfast in his own camp, with Jean speaking after the manner of any normal young woman of to-day.

He stole another glance at her and tried to visualize that gruff personality which called itself Many Feathers. Didn't Jean remember that? Or had he dreamed it after all? But he had not dreamed that other scene in the higher cave, where she had stood behind the sacrificial altar and with arms upstretched toward the east invoked the mercy of the sun god who was burning her people with his flaming eyes. He had not dreamed that she turned and walked straight to the ledge, where she plunged herself into the Pool of Evil Death.

He looked at Betsy and wondered what would be her reactions to the true story of last night's adventures. How would Bill receive it — or Jean herself? Would they believe, even faintly understand? He grinned to himself. No, they would call him a liar and let it go at that. So he closed his lips upon the truth — but nevertheless he thought of it long and often that day and afterward.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

JEAN HAS CABIN FEVER

Brisk, busy days followed the storm and those important events which accompanied it. Betsy and Bill were busy with the carnotite claims, and since Betsy had, in her usual prodigal generosity, located Bill in on an extension claim which gave promise of considerable richness, Bill's interest in archæology was somewhat dulled for the moment. He and Betsy had gone to take a look at the stone giants, it is true, and for an hour Betsy had discussed with Abington the strange effect of lime replacement in the human body which had turned flesh and bone to true fossils. But after that she and Bill had gone back to their carnotite claims, prospectors triumphant and building their castles higher and higher as they gathered the rich ore in sacks with which Betsy had provided herself and which she gleaned from the whipped bushes around her devastated camp.

"When you find anything as rich as this carnotite," she said with her wise smile, "I don't believe in leaving it lying around to tempt people. You know, Bill, this may be just a pocket after all; or a series of pockets, rather. The more I study it, the less it looks

like a true vein. And while there is a fortune in sight, as I said at first, I believe we'll do well to harvest it now. If we can sell out to the Strombergs after we've taken out a ton or so of this rich stuff, well and good. We'll be sure of this much, anyway."

"Darn right," Bill agreed. "I believe in skimmin' the cream ourselves. If the Professor can get along for a while without me, I'll help you get out the ore and cache it in one of these caves. I guess it's about as valuable as gold dust, ain't it, Betsy?"

"You saw how it glows in the dark, didn't you? Some of those richest pieces are like gold nuggets, yes."

At this point Abington looked up from his study of a photograph which he had just that day made of a new and strange group of hieroglyphics.

"If you're going to sack that carnotite," he drawled, "I believe I can put you in touch with a market which will bring you far more than you can hope to get out of Strombergs — or any other mining concern. The man I have in mind is a friend who uses carnotite in its natural state, pulverized. He combines it with electro-magnetic induction and performs miracles of healing with the stuff. I don't know how much Strombergs would pay for the claims, but I do know that this man of whom I am speaking has paid as high as twenty and twenty-five dollars a pound for high-grade carnotite ore."

"For the love of swe-et sassafras!" Betsy intoned just under her breath, staring at Abington like one in a daze. "All that million-dollar information in your brain, and you listen to us talk for a week about selling out to Strombergs before you recall a fact that means a fortune! Jack Abington, are all scientists as foolish as you?"

"I hope so," Abington retorted. "You received the information in ample time for its intelligent use, and that, it seems to me, is an evidence of real wisdom. You are welcome to the information, which is of no particular value to me. My friend the miracle worker does not use fossils in his laboratory."

"Would you listen to that!" sighed Betsy. "Well, Bill, let us receive the information with proper humility and fill as many sacks as possible before some one comes prowling into the valley and discovers what we are about. I fancy this radium man will want only the very richest ore, so I shall let you do the digging while I do the sorting. And Jean, dear, I think we must appoint you housekeeper for the time being. Jack has no mind for anything outside his caves, and Bill and I are going to be busy from daylight until dark. It means our round-the-world trip, honey, so you don't mind, do you?"

Jean did not. At least, that is what she gave them all to understand; if her voice lacked enthusiasm, the three were much too absorbed in their own affairs to

notice it. A community kitchen had been arranged, Betsy's salvaged camp paraphernalia having been packed over on the burros and set up in the basin — with the tent walled up as Bill and Abington had safeguarded their own. Abington had moved down his workshop from the cave, using as an excuse the chill discomfort of the place, now that colder weather was upon them, and the loss of time he suffered in going back and forth.

All in all, they had a snug camp and a friendly one, and the combined kitchen and dining room had already assumed the homey atmosphere of a place where friendly foregatherings were of frequent occurrence; a small oasis of contentment in that wild place which even Bill reacted to pleasantly.

That Jean might possibly feel a bit lonely now and then did not occur to any one. Was she not a participator in their good fortune? Betsy made daily mention of that trip around the world, just for good measure. That she and Bill were everlastingly talking together of veins and formations and things completely outside the girl's knowledge was to Betsy a natural development of their common interests and their daily association. Jean, knowing nothing of these things, was not expected to talk about them. She would share in the benefits and that, if Betsy thought of it at all, seemed enough to satisfy any one.

But Jean was not satisfied. She wanted some one

to talk to; some one who spoke her language. Abington had withdrawn into his own mental world and seemed not to care whether any one shared it or not. Jean resented his absorption in his work, after that night of perilous adventure which they had spent together. What if she did not know anything about what the world was like a million years ago? What if she did believe that God made the world in six days more or less, breathed the breath of life into a man whom he called Adam, and made Eve out of a rib, and placed the two in a paradise as a sort of experiment in creation (as she vaguely understood it)? Abington had said that God did create the world and all that was in it, including man. He had even said that speaking in terms of ages instead of days the story of creation might be traced very beautifully by science and found to agree essentially with the Bible story.

He had said that, yes. But why didn't he take the trouble to explain it to her so that she would understand it just as he did? She was willing to learn; she was no narrow-minded bigot. Why didn't he teach her to read the hieroglyphics? She would have been glad to learn all he knew about it, and perhaps she could have helped him. She had no desire to explore the caves with him — certain phases of that night could still make her flesh creep. But at least he might talk about his work a little, instead of sitting all even-

ing with his pipe and a pencil, fiddling over meaningless diagrams while Bill and her Aunt Betsy had their heads together over a box of ore, sorting and comparing and gloating, for all the world like a couple of kids playing some game.

She could wash dishes, yes. She could tidy the camp and stay all day alone in it, supposed to be happy because she had in prospect a trip around the world! She could go crazy, Jean told herself fiercely in the times when her loneliness and her self-pity plunged her deepest in the black pit of gloom. They were a selfish, self-centered lot and she hated them all.

Jean, as you may suspect, had a touch of cabin fever.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

ABINGTON DISAPPEARS

"Hasn't the celebrated scientist come in yet?" Betsy had washed her face and drawn a broken comb several times through her bobbed hair and now she was ready for supper; quite as ready as supper was for her, and it had been waiting for more than an hour. "This hobnobbing with Adam and leaving us in the lurch must stop. Shall we wait for him, Bill? Here we thought we were going to be late and eat a cold supper, and Jack hasn't even shown up yet. I'm half starved — but shall we wait a little while?"

"Wait? Not any longer than I can git my plate filled!" Bill proceeded to illustrate his meaning, and Betsy joined him with a mental apology. Jean, it transpired, was not hungry — a plate of crumbly fudge mutely explaining the loss of appetite.

As usual, Bill and her Aunt Betsy talked and talked and found a great deal to laugh at which Jean did not consider funny, and she was left to look on and smile politely when they chanced to look at her. She was growing terribly tired of mining and the desert and the old days in Tonopah and Goldfield and how this man made his stake and the other one lost a

bigger one, which was all the two ever seemed to talk about. She wished Abington would come; at least, he might have a new stone hammer or something to show for his day's prowling through the caves.

Betsy helped her with the dishes, which they finally decided to wash, leaving Abington's supper in the oven with the door open. But even over the dish-wiping her Aunt Betsy still continued talking with Bill and laughing that inimitable laugh at every inane joke he told her. Jean's eyes went often to the round alarm clock which hung on a tent pole. Of course, it was merely because she was bored and, moreover, wanted the supper entirely cleared away and done with, but she did wish Abington would hurry up.

She was still wishing it at nine o'clock when Bill, yawning widely over his own joke (which Jean had considered perfectly inane), glanced at the clock and observed that this was the latest he ever was up. How her Aunt Betsy could see anything funny in that threadbare statement was a mystery to Jean. But Aunt Betsy did think it funny, evidently; at least she laughed at it.

"Time the Professor was trailing in," Bill added, with another look at the clock. "He must be puttin' in an extra shift. Didn't take any grub with him, did he, Jean?"

"No," said Jean shortly, "he didn't."

"You don't suppose he's had any trouble, do you,

Bill?" Betsy also yawned and glanced at the clock. "This is the very latest he ever was out."

Bill laughed.

"Say, you don't know him like I do," he chuckled, "or you wouldn't worry none when he overstays himself. Say, I used to do that, but I don't no more. I'd just as quick worry about a coyote being up too late at night! Why, he was in that hill two days, first trip we made in here, and it never feazed him. I was runnin' the hills like a scared wolf, lookin' for him, and he come in chipper as you please. Say, you couldn't hurt that bird with an axe!"

That tickled Betsy, too. They laughed together over the alleged joke, and Jean got up disgustedly and lighted a lantern and went out to the tent she shared with her aunt. Silly — that's what they were, plain silly. Jean wondered why she had never before noticed that silly streak in her Aunt Betsy. As for Bill — well, one could expect that of a man. Men always acted silly if a woman looked twice in their direction.

It must have been an hour after that before Betsy came to bed, and she remarked then that she had waited up for Jack; she wanted to show him some fresh ore she had found that day, and ask him what he thought of it. Jean did not ask her aunt whether he had come; she knew he hadn't, for she had been lying there listening for his voice.

At breakfast time there was some debate over the advisability of going to look for Abington. Bill was still rather volubly certain that Abington would turn up all right when he had finished whatever it was that interested him; a bit too volubly, any careful observer would have thought. Betsy was anxious, but as usual she deferred to Bill's more intimate knowledge of Abington's habits.

"That's one thing I dislike about scientists," she criticized mildly. "They're so self-centered. To them the thing they happen to be doing is the one thing which will save the human race from utter demoralization. It may be classifying a butterfly or it may be finding a germ or a giant — it is the one thing of importance for the time being."

Bill thought that generalization fitted Abington exactly, but Jean was furious with her aunt; with Abington also, because he had caused her a sleepless night; and with Bill because he showed so little concern for his employer. The two potential millionaires let the matter go with talking, and went off to the claims, patently uneasy, in spite of their assertions that Abington would show up all right.

That day was a season of anxious waiting, so far as Jean was concerned. More than once she was on the point of going herself to look for Abington, but the uncertainty of his objective when he last left camp and a very pardonable pride which would not yield

to outright worry sent her back to camp before she had gone far. Then, too, he might return from any one of three directions and still be taking a direct route from the caves. He had not told her where he was going. He could have gone up on the ridge to his old workshop in the cavern, or over the opposite ridge and down a certain canyon to where it headed into the mountain, its nearest side having the opening which led into the cave of the stone giants; or he may have gone exploring in the canyons of the main range of hills, as he had once or twice remarked that he would do before long. Bill inclined to that last conjecture and argued that Abington had a compass and was naturally as hard to lose as a coyote. Jean wished he would not use that comparison so often; she had a feeling that coyotes were opprobrious animals and she considered Bill guilty of disloyalty whenever he mentioned one in the same sentence with Abington.

So Jean went no farther than the top of the ridge that day.

The miners returned early to camp and their first question was, had Abington returned. When they heard that he had not, Betsy O'Donovan sank down on a box and looked blankly from Bill to Jean and back again.

"I'm worried about that man," she announced in a challenging tone. "I've lived too long in the desert

where a disappearance means danger. I know one thing: I never would leave a prospector unaccounted for so long from camp without looking for him. Jean, honey, if supper is near enough ready let's eat, for I'm famished. Then I vote that we go and look for Jack. It's all right, Bill, to say he's equal to any emergency — but wonderful as he is (and I'm admitting it) he couldn't walk any farther with a broken leg than you or I could. Furthermore, his soul may be made of iron and his heart of flint, for all I know, but his body is flesh and bone and bones can break, I don't care who they belong to."

Supper was a scrambled-together, uncomfortable meal after that speech. The three set out with lanterns to use in case they were gone after dark. They visited the stone giants and found nothing changed, tramped on in the deepening dusk to another cave which Bill thought Abington might have visited and returned to camp much more anxious than they cared to admit and too tired to discuss it if they had wanted to.

By morning Bill threw his pretended unconcern to the winds and started out at daybreak. There was, he declared, nothing to be feared in the caves. Abington and he had been through most of the passages and had marked them, and those that were strange would be explored with due caution. Abington would not risk getting lost a second time, said Bill. He car-

ried chalk, carbide, water, a compass, candles and plenty of matches, and he had warned Bill to do the same whenever he ventured alone into the mountain. Bill kept to the open that day, however.

But on the next morning he prepared to go underground, as did the women. Jean especially had turned stubborn and refused to be left in camp, and Betsy perforce went along. Mindful of every possible emergency, they added rope to the regular equipment — and Jean insisted that it be as long as possible. Jean was hollow-eyed by now, after three nights of increasing anxiety. If the two had not been preoccupied with their own worry they must have wondered at Jean's febrile impatience with every moment of delay, her tense eagerness in the search.

All day long they tramped up and down the gloomy passages, calling Abington's name aloud. They penetrated even to the end of the ancient watercourse where Jean had tried hard to pull Abington up from the Pool of Evil Death. They waited there, shouting at intervals, listening long for some faint answer. Bill even fired his six-shooter out into the blackness of the great cavern where the drip, drip, drip of that tiny rivulet went on day after day, year after year, century after century, for all any one could tell. But only the hollow echoes made reply.

As they turned at last to leave the dismal place, the tinkling drip, drip, drip of water falling upon rock

followed them eerily and drove them on to less fearsome caves and corridors.

At dusk they emerged dispiritedly into the open and made their way back to camp, hoping he had returned in their absence. But there was no sign of him anywhere, and even Bill no longer attempted to hide his foreboding fear that some great calamity had overtaken Abington.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

ABINGTON FINDS TREASURE IN PLENTY

ABINGTON wound his wrist watch, turned the valve of his lamp so that the smallest catclaw of flame would burn and once more took up the stone vase. It was not of much use to pound on a rock which must be all of three feet thick — two at the very least — but there was nothing else to do and the crumbling skeleton on the floor beside him gave mute evidence of the hopelessness of waiting for release. He began to pound the rock slowly, sometimes without much force, but with a steady drumming that had become terribly monotonous after three days of it.

Behind him sat other stone jars, ranged along the wall. Two were broken at his feet, the result of a continual whacking against the stone. Where they had stood beside their fellows little heaps of blue stones, some of them delicately carved, all of them beautifully shaped and polished, lay where he had dumped them to get the stone that held them. The stone vase which he held now was also carved with some queer, intricate symbol which at any other time would have held his interest enthralled. But now, after so long imprisonment in this square tomb, his

sole interest in the priceless relic whose like he had never before seen lay in the fact that it was larger than the urns and heavier and would probably make more noise.

"Damn' fool — walk into a trap I might have known was set to catch meddlers. Should have known it — did know it. But that damned bracelet rolling out when I swung the rock — that brought me in here like a rat after a bacon rind!" So he muttered while he thump — thump — thumped on the swinging stone that had swung twice (once under the pressure of his hand and once of its own accord, when he had passed through the opening it had closed) and seemed likely never to swing again.

"If Bill hears — or if Jean should happen to take another one of those mediumistic spells — not likely — the damage is done, now. They've baited me in here — what they wanted, no doubt. They wouldn't help me out — even if they're real. Probably some hysterical fit — she'd been sick, Betsy said."

Thump — thump — thump — and yet, his thoughts ran on while his lips were silent, how had she been able to prophesy — this? She had said that he would find what he sought, and might lose his life in the finding. How had she known that?

"Guesswork," his moving lips took up the thought. "Knew this work's dangerous — subconscious mind played a trump that time."

He stopped to rest, leaning against the rock while he wiped the beads of perspiration from his face, the stone urn fallen at his feet. It was hard work when you kept it up hour after hour, for three days and nights. He picked up the lamp, nursed the flame and staggered over to sit beside the heaps of blue sapphires and finger them absently while he rested.

A treasure house, and he locked inside it with the bones of one who had been trapped as he had been, by the stone which swung inward under the pressure of his palm, then swung back again to its place, leaving him in the vault! His haggard eyes strayed to the other jars. Huge bracelets of heavy, hammered gold and silver and copper — some of them with the metals curiously blended — filled those jars; bracelets and other ornaments which he had not completely classified. And the sapphires and chalcedony and tourmalines. Quarts of them. But, as the princess had so wisely said, of what avail?

That vase, now. It had held nothing but dust, but he felt certain, from the inscriptions carved upon it, that the dust was all that remained of the hearts of men. Interesting — but of what avail?

After a few minutes of sitting there musing on the uselessness of his discovery if he were to be entombed with the treasure, he got up, and with a sigh of weariness he picked up the heavy urn and once more began that slow, methodical thumping on the rock. It was

not much; it might bring no result, though he thumped until he died. But so long as he could lift the stone, he would whack it against the rock because that was the only thing left for him to do and he must fight as long as the breath was in him. He could not lie down passively and wait for death as that other had done.

He was whacking away with the chipped base of the precious urn when the rock began to move toward him, slowly at first and then with a rush that came near throwing him off his feet. Lights glared in his face, made him blink after the gloom of that one little pinpoint of flame which was all he dared permit himself lest carbide and water should be used and he be left to die in the dark. That fear had rather haunted Abington after the first few hours.

How it came about he could not explain, but after the first incoherencies had passed he discovered Jean tightly clasped in his arms while one hand pressed her bobbed head closely to his breast. It was over Jean's head that he found himself talking to Betsy and Bill. Even after he realized what he was doing he made no move to release the girl; indeed he held her the closer and patted her shoulder when he felt her sobbing silently against him.

"Yes, I — ah — met with a slight accident," he heard himself saying in an abominably casual tone. "Found the treasure vault and very foolishly stepped

inside before I had learned the trick of operating the swinging stone. I — ah ——"

"Man alive, you must be starved! Jean, for heaven's sake let go of him a minute so he can eat this sandwich! Here's a thermos bottle of hot coffee too. Bill said you take it black." This, of course, was Betsy O'Donovan, ready to cry with relief at finding him and ready to brain any one who suspected her of the weakness.

"We heard you poundin' on the rock," Bill fatuously informed him. "I guess this was about the only part of the caves we didn't hunt through thoroughly yesterday."

His arm still around Jean as if that were the most natural place in the world for it, he followed them unsteadily down that passage to a less menacing spot. There he emptied the thermos bottle and nibbled without much appetite at a sandwich. Already the tragedy that had threatened was beginning to seem a bit unreal; a hazard safely passed.

"Well, now we've found you, let's get out into the open. My heavens, how a man can turn his back on good, safe mining for the sake of prowling around these awful caves is a mystery to me. If there was anything to be gained by it, I wouldn't wonder at it. But just for the sake of being able to say you know how people wore their hair a thousand years ago — I can't see the sense in it, Jack. You'd better come in

with us on the carnotite proposition. There's enough to make us all rich."

"Oh, as to that — Jean, do you remember that night when you suggested that I find jewels and gold? Acting upon that suggestion, I have discovered treasure enough to buy all the carnotite these two miners can produce. You shall have gold bracelets big enough to wear around your neck — almost. And a lapful of jewels ——"

"I don't care anything about them," Jean recklessly cried, "so long as you're safe. Let's go. I hate this place!"

"Amen to that," said Betsy, and would have started off in the wrong direction if Bill had not brought her back and led her out the other way. Already they were chuckling together over some little joke of their own, leaving Abington and Jean to follow or not as they chose. But for some reason Jean did not notice their going nor hear their inane laughter. Nor did Abington, for that matter.

"I suppose," Betsy began after dinner, when they were sitting in the kitchen tent, listening to a more detailed account of Abington's discovery, "I suppose we may as well 'fess up the truth now as any time. We're going to have company on our trip around the world, Jean. Bill wants to go along — and I told him he might. You won't mind if we make it a little

honeymoon trip, will you? Of course, you'll be just as welcome as — as ——"

"As a string of old shoes tied to your trunk," Jean finished with crude exactness. "No, thank you, Aunt Betsy. I couldn't think of intruding."

"Why don't you tell her why?" Abington demanded, his black eyes glowing, as he reached for her hand boldly and without hesitation or shame. "We're planning a trip of our own, that's why. After I put my work here in shape so that I can leave it," he added. "I must put my stone men in some museum, and make my record of inscriptions a bit more complete, and then I think Jean and I will see something of the world ourselves."

Betsy looked from one to the other with her sweet, wise little smile.

"I knew that was about what would happen to you two," she said calmly. "That's why I decided to tell you what we're planning."

Bill broke into sudden laughter and slapped a palm down upon his thigh.

"By golly, us Adam chasers both had to let Eve get into the game!" he chortled, and even Jean laughed with him and thought him very witty.

THE END

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THE ADAM CHASERS

By

B. M. BOWER

"Adam chaser" — that's what Bill Jonathan called Professor Abington, an archaeologist searching caves in the Nevada mountains for hieroglyphics and fossil remains. Bill was dodging the sheriff when he accidentally came across what the Professor was seeking, and he was glad enough to join forces and turn guide. Betsy O'Donovan and her niece, Jean, however, invaded the locality and, though they were only seeking valuable minerals and regarded the two men as rivals in their own field, the archaeologist was sure that they were sent out by a scientific competitor to forestall his discoveries.

With this mutual distrust and suspicion the stage was set for events which involved Abington and Jean in great danger. It was not until they had faced death together as enemies that their real aims were disclosed and suspicions dissolved.

This is in one sense a new field for the author, since the characters are neither cowboys nor ranch folk, but they have the true essence of Bower humor and unlimited zest of life.

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